United Nations
A/52/PV.58

General Assembly

Fifty-second Session

Official Records

58th plenary meeting

Monday, 1 December 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 36

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/52/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/581)

Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/52/571)

The President: I first give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): It is a genuine pleasure for me once again to address the General Assembly in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and it is also an honour for me to open the annual debate on the agenda item entitled “Question of Palestine”.

I should like first of all to congratulate you once again, Sir, on your well-deserved election to the presidency of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly and to recall that you were an active member of our own Committee. Your boundless energy, your diplomatic skills and your devotion to the objectives of the United Nations are well known and greatly appreciated by all. I am convinced that you will guide our work in the most productive manner.

Not so long ago, some delegations felt that the mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People had been made redundant by the positive evolution of the peace process and that the Committee and other United Nations bodies active on this issue should be phased out, together with the Secretariat units servicing them. I think that those delegations quickly changed their minds in the light of the impasse in the peace process.

While welcoming the achievements in the negotiations since September 1993 with the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the subsequent developments, in particular the Interim Agreement of 1995, the Committee cautioned that these were but steps towards the full achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Because the situation on the ground remained fragile and littered with pitfalls, the Committee reminded the international community that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility on the question of Palestine until the question has been resolved in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy.

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

As the organ established by the General Assembly to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee has continued to endeavour to play an essential role during the transitional period envisaged by the accords and will do so until the desired solution had been reached. In the context of the international community's efforts to find a solution, we would have been the first to rejoice at positive developments in the peace process, a process that had aroused such high hopes the world over.

But today the Committee is deeply saddened and disconcerted by the increasing difficulties and obstacles that have made the peace process fragile. By resuming its policy of constructing settlements and confiscating land; by increasingly encroaching upon occupied East Jerusalem and denying residency rights to Palestinians born and living there; by carrying out prolonged and punishing blockades of the areas under Palestinian Authority control; by postponing withdrawal from much of the West Bank; by its indifferent acceptance of harassment by armed settlers against innocent, unarmed Arab civilians; by carrying out punitive expeditions and acts of intimidation against Palestinian populations; by forbidding Palestinian families to be reunited: in all these ways, the Israeli Government has created a situation of deepening despair and tension in the occupied Palestinian territory. The behaviour of the occupying Power has thus increasingly undermined the confidence and lowered the expectations brought about in 1993 by the peace process.

The Committee has repeatedly condemned acts of violence by extremists, which have resulted in tragic loss of life among innocent civilians on both sides. Such reprehensible acts are the work of the enemies of peace. They sow fear and mistrust and prevent progress towards the reconciliation that is essential to the achievement of a lasting, peaceful political solution between the parties.

The retaliatory actions taken by the Israeli Government against the entire Palestinian population can never be justified or accepted by the international community as necessary security measures. Indeed, by strangling the economy and impeding normal movement between Gaza and the West Bank, they compound feelings of insecurity and tension and cause regrettable delays in the peace process. They can only fuel further instability, violence and insecurity.

Over the past year, as Chairman of the Committee, I have repeatedly expressed these concerns to the Security Council, as well as to the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-first session and at its tenth emergency special session. I have urged these organs, and the international community as a whole, to intensify their efforts and initiatives to save and reinvigorate the peace process and to ensure respect for the provisions of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

I have also actively participated on behalf of the Committee in the frequent deliberations on Palestine held by intergovernmental bodies, notably the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Organization of African Unity. Their resolutions and decisions, as well as those of other intergovernmental and United Nations bodies, testify to their keen interest and deep concern with respect to the disturbing situation in Palestine. They reflect a determination to act collectively to break the dangerous impasse in which the peace process is trapped. The community of peace-loving nations simply wishes through its messages to make the parties understand that only peace can bring security, and that only security can preserve peace.

In carrying out its mandate, the Committee has also done everything possible to make an effective and constructive contribution through the programme of seminars and meetings of non-governmental organizations organized under its auspices. Those meetings have provided a forum for frank and useful discussion and for the adoption of action-oriented strategies with the participation of Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, experts, leaders, eminent individuals and Palestinian and Israeli decision makers.

We also attach particular importance to the programme of studies and publications, and other activities of the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights, including the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations electronic information system on the question of Palestine.

When he introduces the Committee report, I am sure that the Rapporteur will provide the necessary details about these various activities.

For my part, I would like to take this opportunity to express the Committee's gratitude and appreciation for the generous support of the Governments of Indonesia and of Jordan, which provided venues and facilities for the holding of an Asian seminar and non-governmental organization symposium and for a seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people respectively.

We are also deeply grateful to the Belgian Government for offering facilities for a conference next February to be organized in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, and to the Chilean Government for having agreed to the holding of the next Latin American and Caribbean seminar and non-governmental organization symposium.

The General Assembly is aware that the Republic of South Africa has requested to become a full member of the Committee and that Namibia will soon do the same. We try to encourage greater participation by all States in the Committee's activities, and other Governments have expressed an interest. We also note with appreciation the increasingly positive votes on many resolutions relating to the question of Palestine, as seen in the overwhelming majorities in favour of the resolutions adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. This growing support sends a clear message and is a source of hope and reassurance, encouraging all the members of the Committee to intensify our efforts even further in the coming year.

I believe that the events of the past year have shown, without the shadow of a doubt, the great dangers of the policies of expansion and exclusion pursued by the present Israeli leadership. These policies run directly counter to the historical trend towards the resolution of conflicts in the world through dialogue and cooperation. Confidence-building measures and negotiation that should be at the basis of the dynamic of the peace process.

By seeking to impose an unjust peace denying the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, these policies imperil the achievements of peace and the fragile network of economic, political and social relationships that was beginning to be established in Palestine. A rare historical opportunity is being squandered, with no other viable solution being proposed.

It is time, today more than ever before, to increase initiatives in order to save the peace process and spare the peoples of the region the spectre of war and acts of violence.

We earnestly hope that this debate, like the recent debate at the tenth emergency special session, will show the way towards peace by once again reminding the Israeli leaders of their country's obligations as a State party to the Fourth Geneva Convention and as a Member State of the United Nations. We must also reaffirm the position clearly adopted by the entire international community in favour of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and of a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which remains at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In order to achieve this just and lasting settlement, rooted in international legitimacy, the two parties must make an enormous effort and understand that only peace, mutual confidence and coexistence, with respect for the rights and dignity of all, can put an end to all the bloodshed, to so much sustained hatred and pointless destruction.

The President: I now call on the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Saliba (Malta) Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur, having assumed my new functions earlier this year, to present to the General Assembly for the first time the annual report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

During the past year the Committee continued to do its utmost to implement the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report covers the new developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I, which indicates briefly the Committee's objectives and concerns in the light of the evolving situation. Chapters II and III are procedural; they summarize the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information (DPI) and give information on the Committee's organization of work.

Chapter IV covers developments in the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee in the course of the year. While noting some progress with regard to the peace process early in the year, particularly the signing of the Protocol on Hebron and the release of some Palestinian detainees, the Committee was increasingly concerned at the ongoing deterioration of the situation and the intensification of violence and tension on the ground. The Committee expressed its great concern that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced serious setbacks due to the position of the Government of Israel on the various aspects of the peace process. In particular, the Committee was alarmed by the position of the Government of Israel on the question of Jerusalem, especially the establishment of a new settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, the growing threat to Palestinian residency rights in Jerusalem, the continued expansion of settlements in general, confiscation of Arab land, demolition of Palestinian houses and the prolonged closure of the Palestinian territory.

The main body of the report is in chapter V, which gives an account of the action taken by the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 51/23 and 51/24. The Committee Chairman participated in international efforts in opposition to the new Israeli settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim by drawing the attention of the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council thereto and by actively representing the Committee in all the relevant meetings of the Security Council, the resumed fifty-first session and the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly.

The Committee also sought to remind the international community of the fact that the occupation still continues, by organizing a special commemorative meeting on the thirtieth anniversary of the war of June 1967. The Chairman also raised the Committee's concerns in the relevant international ministerial meetings and summits at which he represented the Committee. The report also notes similar concerns expressed by various United Nations and intergovernmental bodies in their resolutions and communiqués relating to the question of Palestine, the list of which is included in the report.

Chapter V also provides information on the Committee's efforts to make its work more relevant and useful in the light of the new developments on the ground, and to involve additional countries in its work. The Committee continued to endeavour to sharpen the focus of its seminars and non-governmental organization meetings in the various regions, to make them more action-oriented, and to reach out to broader non-governmental organization constituencies. The meetings held during 1997 included the annual meeting of consultations with the representatives of non-governmental organization coordinating committees, held in New York in February; an Asian seminar and non-governmental organization symposium on the question of Palestine, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in May; the annual seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, held in Amman, Jordan, also in May; the annual North American Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, held in New York in June; and the annual European Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations and the International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations, held in Geneva in August. I would like to take this opportunity to join our Chairman in expressing our profound thanks to the Governments of Indonesia and Jordan for providing the venue and facilitating the holding of these important events.

The chapter also provides information on the activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights in the field of research and publications, including the recent issuance of a study on the status of Jerusalem, as well as on the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL). It also provides information on a training programme on the workings of the United Nations for staff of the Palestinian Authority, initiated in 1996, which is being continued this year. Finally, the chapter describes the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which took place in New York as well as at the United Nations Offices in Geneva, Vienna and other cities.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/25, including the publications and audio-visual activities of the Department, and other activities carried out by the Department. The seventh and last chapter contains the recommendations of the Committee to the General Assembly. Noting the various anniversaries of the history of dispossession of the Palestinian people commemorated in 1997, the Committee urges the international community to redouble its efforts in support of their inalienable rights, which are the key to a just and lasting peace. The Committee also considers it essential for the international community to intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and for the effective implementation of the agreements reached since 1993.

At the same time, the Committee expresses its greatest concern at the growing stalemate in the peace process and the exacerbation of tension and violence on the ground. It calls for an end to the prolonged closure of the occupied territory and other forms of collective punishment, in the interest of restoring mutual confidence and promoting peace.

The Committee expresses special concern regarding actions taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and the intensification of settlement construction, as they jeopardize prospects for a just peace and for the achievement of the Palestinian right to self-determination. With regard particularly to Israel's decision to build a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in spite of international opposition, the Committee expresses its full support for the recommendations made by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session, and for the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Committee also states that it will remain engaged in the follow-up to these recommendations in order to promote the necessary action.

The Committee also calls for additional efforts by the international community to restore momentum to the Middle East peace process and reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached, based on established and accepted principles. The Committee reiterates its view that its own role will continue to be useful and necessary until a satisfactory final settlement is reached and invites the General Assembly once again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

Finally, the Committee expresses its great appreciation to those States which have supported its work; it stresses the continued importance and usefulness of its programme of seminars and non-governmental organization meetings; and it calls for the greatest possible participation of States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the meetings organized under its auspices, as such meetings provide useful and unique forums for discussion of all relevant issues and for the development of joint activities by all those concerned.

The Committee also emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat as a focal point for collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine and requests it to continue its programme of publications and studies and to develop further the United Nations computer-based information system on the question of Palestine. It also requests the continuation of the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, the Committee expresses its intention to continue to strive to achieve maximum effectiveness in the implementation of its mandate and to adjust its work programme in the light of developments, in order to continue to contribute, to the extent possible, to the realization of the common United Nations objective of achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

I trust that this report will be of assistance to the General Assembly in facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

The President: The next speaker is the Head of the Observer delegation of Palestine, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I give him the floor.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to speak today, and to begin my statement by greeting and congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly in these turbulent international circumstances. We trust in your wisdom to ensure the success of this session. We would also like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail, who presided over the previous session with success. I should also like to express our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, who continues to work tirelessly on the question of Palestine.

We are returning here to the General Assembly to examine the question of Palestine after the shock that international public opinion underwent as a result of the impasse in the peace process, especially when Mr. Netanyahu became Prime Minister of Israel last year following the success of the Likud coalition in the recent elections. In those elections, the extremist right in Israel was victorious. Everyone knows that the extremist and fundamentalist parties have bolstered their position. They won more parliamentary seats, resulting in an imbalance in the composition of the Israeli Knesset. This is a proof that the current of extremism inside Israeli society is continuing to enjoy a majority, which ensures its overwhelming success.

In the wake of the assassination of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, it was expected that the parties and groups that advocate peace would be successful. But the situation has been reversed, with the fall of the Labour party and the triumph of *Likud* and its extremist allies.

Moreover, Israeli extremism has been manifested in the creation of pretexts and facts on the ground which concretely reaffirm the Israeli Government's rejection of the concluded agreements and its reneging on previous obligations. It has therefore called for re-examination of the agreement concerning redeployment from Hebron which was signed by the previous Labour Government. That redeployment was supposed to have been completed before the Israeli elections in order for redeployment to be resumed from the rural areas, labelled B, and the departure of the Israeli army from over 600 Palestinian villages. But Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, insisted on discussing the departure from Hebron thus wasting seven months and, in the end, winning 20 per cent of the territory of the city following its partition, keeping for Israel the historical, commercial and industrial parts of the city, even though the town of Hebron is 100 per cent Palestinian.

Regrettably, instead of the United States playing a positive role to prevent a recurrence of the cycle of violence and to reduce the tension, Mr. Christopher, the former United States Secretary of State, sent a letter to Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, in which he acknowledged the right of freedom to redeploy the Israeli army, to set a date for that redeployment and its geographical extent and to determine the degree to which more powers would be transferred to the Palestinian National Authority. All of that was without negotiations with the Palestinians, thus contravening the provisions of the accord that called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces and their redeployment from 30 per cent of the territory of the Palestinian West Bank immediately following the implementation of the Hebron Protocol.

Despite the agreement reached between the Palestinian and Israeli sides on an accord on the city, the Government of Israel immediately started the construction of settlements in Jebel Abu Ghneim in the occupied area of Jerusalem/Bethlehem while it was supposed to start withdrawing its forces from the rural areas instead of starting to confiscate Palestinian lands and building settlements on them.

With regard to Jerusalem, Israel continues its violations. It confiscates Palestinian homes and other buildings, especially inside the walled Holy City of Jerusalem. Israel has developed a blueprint, in a very short period of time, to confiscate 18 Palestinian homes in order to house 18 Jewish families, thus challenging the international community, the spiritual dimension of all faiths and the principles of coexistence among all these faiths. This is in addition to its refusal to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 465 (1980), 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 1073 (1996).

Since the signing of the Hebron Protocol and up to the present, negotiations and direct and indirect contacts, at times through concerned intermediaries, have been conducted. In addition, the United States, as a sponsor of the peace talks, is undertaking timid efforts to convince the Israeli Government to fulfil its obligations, to no avail.

When Ms. Albright became Secretary of State she made little effort in that direction. As she put it, she was waiting for the two parties, the Palestinian and the Israeli sides, to reach an understanding, in order for her to visit the region to give the peace march a push and put it back on track.

When the state of tension heightened in the region with a new cycle of violence, Ms. Albright came to the region and convened meetings with all the parties concerned in the peace process, whether Arab or Israeli.

She herself witnessed first hand human and material manifestations which condemn Israeli conduct and prove the necessity of intensifying efforts to prevent the deterioration of the situation in the region. Ms. Albright herself witnessed the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation and under the strict Israeli blockade.

When she returned to Washington, she addressed an invitation to the Palestinians and to the Israelis to meet at a negotiating session in New York in the last third of September 1997. After the meeting she outlined four points at a press conference. She emphasized the security questions and the need to combat terrorism and its infrastructure. But she failed to make a clear reference to the need to put an end to settlement activity and the construction of settlements. At the same time, she referred to the redeployment of the Israeli army, but linked that withdrawal to conditions that would, in point of fact, lead to the non-fulfilment of such a withdrawal.

However, Ms. Albright knows full well that these two points are the underlying causes of the current tension and the resurgence of the cycle of violence in the region.

As is known, the Israeli Government has committed provocative acts, such as the opening of the tunnel adjacent to the holy Moslem shrine, the Haram al-Sharif, in Jerusalem which resulted in violent clashes in September of last year leaving 83 Palestinian martyrs and more than 1,300 other casualties.

majority of them supporting an increase of five non-permanent and five permanent members, while only a few expressed categorical opposition to an increase in permanent membership. The Vice-Chairmen concluded that their findings made it clear that the Open-ended Working Group should fulfil its mandate within an expeditious and realistic time-frame.

I carefully double-checked both elements — enlargement in the two categories and expeditious fulfilment of the mandate — with the views expressed by Heads of State, Heads of Government, Foreign Ministers and Heads of Delegation during this session's opening debate in September-October. Regarding the first element, I found that only 11 — which makes 12 per cent — out of 93 Member States that addressed the question of categories were against new permanent members, four of them expressing not even categorical opposition, but, rather, doubts or preference for rotation schemes on permanent seats. The rest, 81 Member States — which makes 88 per cent — favoured an increase in both categories. Among those that did not address the question were many Member States which referred in general to the official Organization of African Unity (OAU) position or which are otherwise known to support enlargement in both categories of membership.

Regarding the second element, my main criterion was: how did delegations tackle the question of the right timing? Out of 176 statements, 85 — which is almost 80 per cent of those that addressed this question — made more or less the point that a decision on Security Council reform should be taken soon. Only 18 — which is about 20 per cent of those who spoke to it — argued openly against any decision in the near future.

We must face one certainty: as long as we continue our discussion without a concrete negotiating text, all of us will continue to bargain for "best positions". If these "best positions" are maintained or new "best positions" are added, the failure of Security Council reform is guaranteed.

From the beginning, my delegation has tried to do its part to facilitate the process. We have proposed a periodic review which allows new permanent members to be replaced after 10, 15 or 20 years, thereby introducing a new and accountable concept of permanency. Moreover, we have stated on various occasions that, while discrimination within membership categories must be avoided, innovative and future-oriented ways of exercising the veto could be introduced.

In other areas, we also plead for a compromise between minimalist and maximalist positions, leading us to an enlargement package with the following features. The first is four new non-permanent members. The second is five new permanent members, three from the South and two industrialized States. Thirdly, there is election of the possible new permanent members by the General Assembly. Regional groups are not denied the right to propose regional mechanisms to the General Assembly as well; the General Assembly has the final decision. Fourthly, the original permanent members are to be engaged in a dialogue on their veto. Fifthly, the General Assembly decides about a veto for the new permanent members. If it does not agree on a solution, a high-level working group might be set up. In the meantime, new permanent members would enjoy certain interim rights.

Member States have come a long way in discussing reform. Since before 1992, when Member States were invited to submit comments on a possible review of the membership of the Security Council, the issue has been discussed year after year during the opening and the general debate of the forty-seventh, forty-eighth, forty-ninth, fiftieth and fifty-first sessions and now the fifty-second session. In addition, in 1993 the Open-ended Working Group was established, and since then it has submitted its yearly reports to the General Assembly. These reports were considered and adopted by the General Assembly in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997.

This issue cannot continue to be discussed in an abstract and endless manner. It ties up too many resources. Spending too much time and too many resources on dealing only with our own, home-made institutional challenges is not in line with our moral obligation to tackle the really pressing issues, issues which this Organization was created for. As examples, let me mention the areas of development, environment and human rights. In any of them, the existing situation gives serious reason for concern and requires immediate action. Can Member States and the United Nations afford to remain caught up in an internal, self-centred institutional debate which started at the beginning of this decade, if not earlier? My answer is a straight "No". Let us therefore put an end to our navel-gazing and show public opinion that the United Nations can do more than get absorbed in self-focused discussions. Security Council reform is not *l'art pour l'art*.

The imposed time-frame notion has made its entry into declarations of important groups of Member States, such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of African States, to mention only two. Germany could not agree more with this position. No one can impose a time-frame on the General Assembly. There can be little doubt either that the General Assembly is sovereign in arranging a calendar for its decisions, if it wants to. A decision taken by the General Assembly in this sense, and in accordance with the Charter and the rules of procedure, is not "imposed"; at least, I myself have never heard someone question the legitimacy of a decision of the General Assembly by calling it "imposed". What we are dealing with here is not an imposed time-frame but a most ordinary agenda. It is agendas which determine our lives. Without an agenda little would ever go ahead.

By taking a decision in the near future, we would not introduce divisions in the United Nations membership, as some have claimed. The opposite seems to me to be true: the real division would be a continuation of fruitless and antagonizing exchanges in the Open-ended Working Group without any time agenda. Rather, further damage and contention would be prevented if an early preliminary decision to put Security Council reform on the tracks were taken through a democratic decision-making process in the General Assembly.

While I am convinced that sufficient time for reflection has to be given to those who need it, I am also pleading that we give ourselves a clear agenda to arrive at a decision. Moreover, I would like to point out two things. First, my delegation, at least, was not ready, and still is not ready, to put forward a proposal, since we feel that, in particular, the question of the overall size of the Security Council has not yet been agreed entirely. Secondly, if we had found agreement on a proposal with our like-minded friends, the Assembly can take my word that it would not have been presented to the membership by surprise. We have always been open about that, to everybody, including the main sponsors of document A/52/L.7.

Let me finally turn to a point of particular importance: the proposal to go beyond the Charter and to apply its Article 108 not only to amendments, but also to "amendment implications". I have been wondering what "implications" could mean in legal terms. For instance has a resolution like the one the Sixth Committee — our lawyers — adopted on 6 December 1995, with the positive votes of Italy and Mexico and as many as 92 countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, among them Egypt and Pakistan, had Charter amendment "implications"? When I read the resolution I found that by it the General Assembly recognizes that

> "the 'enemy State' clauses in Articles 53, 77 and 107 of the Charter have become obsolete". [Resolution 50/52, thirteenth preambular paragraph]

A few lines later the resolution expresses the intention of the General Assembly to

> "initiate the procedure set out in Article 108 of the Charter ... to amend the Charter" [ibid, para. 3]

— that is, to apply Article 108 only at a later, perhaps the next, stage of the process. In my view, resolution 50/52 did have clear Charter amendment "implications", but correctly deferred the application of Article 108 to the next stage of amending the Charter *in concreto*.

To take another example: what if a draft Charter amendment resolution were to be postponed or submitted to a no-action motion? Would not we have to admit that these actions had "implications" for the envisaged Charter amendments? Or does not the General Assembly, when it decides to adopt reports of the Open-ended Working Group stating that there is agreement to expand the Security Council — see, for instance, paragraph 13 of document A/49/47 of 15 September 1995 — take decisions with Charter amendment "implications"?

Security Council reform is too important an issue to let ambiguities on the necessary voting majorities continue to exist. In paragraph 2 of Article 18, the Charter provides that decisions on important questions

> "shall be made by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting".

I shall give an example. If for a vote on an important resolution which does not contain a Charter amendment 180 Member States are present and 170 of them vote, the necessary majority will be 114, which is two-thirds of 170. It is Germany's firm view that this majority must apply to important resolutions dealing with Security Council reform.

Article 108 of the Charter requires a majority of two-thirds of all Member States, which means at least 124 out of the present 185 Member States. Scholars and academia consider Article 108 a derogation of, and exception to, the general rules laid down in paragraph 2 of Article 18 of the Charter, and therefore not open to analogous extension and applicable only when — to quote Article 108 — "Amendments to the present Charter" are submitted. The *raison d'etre* of Article 108 is that the authors of the Charter wanted to make sure that any amendment to be sent to parliaments for ratification would have received beforehand a sufficiently large majority in the General Assembly to guarantee its following ratification.

Introducing a term like "Charter amendment implications" is not helpful, and even risks disrespect for the Charter and its well-defined voting system. Politically, it does not make a great difference, since the necessity of reaching a two-thirds majority of members present and voting under paragraph 2 of Article 18 is undisputed. When the General Assembly decision on concrete Charter amendments is taken, the necessary majority will, of course, have to be at least 124.

This interpretation of Article 108 of the Charter seems to me to be clear. However, in order to have the question clarified for everybody, I should like to ask you, Mr. President, to request a legal opinion from the Secretariat on the issue of whether or not Article 108 of the Charter is also applicable to decisions with amendment "implications".

Mr. Amorim (Brazil): Mr. President, I would like to start by expressing my delegation's sincere appreciation for your skilful guidance in preparing the ground for today's debate. Security Council reform being one of the central issues on the United Nations agenda, it is reassuring to note that the President of the General Assembly is ready to exercise his wisdom and leadership in order to move our debate forward.

We have travelled a considerable distance since I last took the podium to address this issue a year ago. Thanks to the competence and dedication demonstrated by the co-Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group, Ambassador Breitenstein of Finland and Ambassador Jayanama of Thailand, we were able to start the year 1997 under the sign of a renewed dynamism. The exchange of views which they carried out with a total of 165 delegations, large and small, individually or in groups, revealed certain trends, providing delegations with a more focused image of where the possibilities for agreement lie. Their important findings, as transmitted to the Working Group on 10 and 14 March, have been included in our latest report, document A/51/47, under annex VII, and deserve to be recalled.

The co-Vice-Chairmen were able to discern the existence of a very large majority which favours an increase in both permanent and non-permanent membership. It is also of great significance that this majority believes there should be permanent members from both developing and industrialized countries.

These are the essential elements on the basis of which we must search for general agreement. My delegation, along with many others, is ready to proceed on Council reform taking fully into account the solid preparatory groundwork undertaken during this active year. As was made clear in the speech delivered by the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Relations, Ambassador Luiz Felipe Lampreia:

> "There is a new thrust to negotiations. There is leadership, as well as carefully crafted proposals. We must take advantage of this unique opportunity in the history of the United Nations. We must not let the moment pass. Reform has become, more than a key concept; it has become the order of the day". [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 5th meeting, p. 7]

In January 1998 the Working Group will resume its activities. Brazil is convinced that there is no need for additional exploratory debates and that we should fully embark on a negotiating process. We do not favour the establishment of artificial targets of any kind for completing our work. But we also oppose attempts to unduly slow down proceedings. Let us put aside the idea of artificial time-frames of any kind, either to impose hasty solutions or to obstruct the process. Let us make the most of the present session of the General Assembly in its entirety and concentrate our attention on the issues that require further refinement, such as veto and numbers — and I will come back to that later.

In this year's general debate, Brazil expressed its willingness to accept the responsibilities of permanent membership in the Security Council, if called upon by the international community. Brazil is determined to carry out the role of permanent member as the representative of Latin America and the Caribbean so that our region may be present in the Council on a permanent basis and, through regular coordination and consultation, have a strong collective voice. As a non-permanent member, we have endeavoured in the past to maintain close coordination with countries in the region, and we will continue to do so during our next mandate. We are prepared to make this coordination and these consultations even more systematic and formal, in order to ensure that the interests and concerns of the region will be reflected to the fullest extent possible.

We consider that the proposal contained in annex I of this year's report — the so-called Razali proposal — constitutes an appropriate framework, with the necessary adjustments, for reforming the Security Council in a non-discriminatory and democratic way, allowing for Member States to express themselves in the General Assembly on candidacies for permanent membership from both the industrialized and the developing world. The proposal provides sufficient leeway for regional consultation and does not prejudge any outcome, although it does rule out discriminatory ones, which is one of the main reasons why we value it so much. We should not forget, in this respect, that since the adoption at the end of the General Assembly's fiftieth session of the report contained in document A/50/47, we have been working under the assumption that:

> "In the event that there is agreement for an increase in the permanent membership, an increase only by industrialized countries would be widely regarded as unacceptable." [A/50/47, para. 26]

We would regard a reform which ascribed full permanent seats to industrialized countries and rotating seats to the developing world as unacceptable and contrary to that conclusion. It is a different matter if one part of the world comes forth with a specific suggestion arrived at by consensus, at the regional level, and submits it to the General Assembly. We understand that this has been a position held by African countries, and we fully respect that, even if, conceptually, we might have our misgivings.

We are confident that we will continue to move away from discriminatory conceptions of expansion and that those who contemplate the idea of permanent rotating seats as a solution for their own region will continue to hold that this is not exportable. As far as we are concerned, there is no market in Latin America and the Caribbean for this product.

In spite of the important strides made this year, we have still not found a centre of gravity as regards some complex issues, such as the veto and the total number of members in an expanded Council. Brazil has advanced several ideas with the objective of rendering the decision-making process in the Security Council more democratic, without impinging upon Charter privileges which the five permanent members are clearly unprepared to give up at this stage. We believe that there should be no discrimination, in principle, between current and new permanent members. At the same time, we have suggested that new permanent members might consider the option of not exercising their veto rights, without relinquishing them, until a comprehensive agreement on decision-making, involving all permanent members, can be arrived at. In other words, sensitive as the veto issue may be, it should not prevent us from moving ahead on expanding the Council's composition.

As to the overall number of members, a few delegations continue to have misgivings about a Council of more than 21 participants, in contrast with the preference of the wide majority for a higher figure, somewhere in the mid-twenties. While the problems related to the veto — in spite of the fact that they touch on difficult questions of principle — may be surmountable through intensified dialogue and negotiation, it appears that the numbers issue is at once a simpler but a more immediate stumbling block. It is our expectation that, as other aspects fall into place, some creative thinking on matters such as the action threshold and on improved Security Council practices and procedures may be able to help us in this regard.

It has sometimes been alleged that the incapacity of developing countries to reach consensus on prospective permanent members constitutes a major obstacle at this stage of our work. This is a gross distortion of the facts. To start with, as we all know, the strongest opposition to expansion in permanent membership is to be found in the industrialized world itself. The argument according to which there is no consensus in the regions of the South applies, perhaps with greater validity, to regions of the North. But this is not the issue. Consensus, although desirable, may not be attainable in any region, North or South. The real issues that are impeding progress are the veto and the numbers question. These should be the focus of attention as we resume our discussions within the Working Group next year.

If so many delegations have expressed an interest on this item of our agenda it is because we are here discussing the credibility of the United Nations in a principal area of concern: the maintenance of international peace and security. The future of the multilateral system of collective security rests on the legitimacy and representativeness of the Security Council. As recently stated in the British magazine *The Economist*, in an article on one of the major crises that the world is facing now,

> "the Security Council is in a poor way, knowing that it should long ago have reformed itself".

Let us not prolong this agony indefinitely. Let us work firmly and responsibly towards a solution that is equitable and balanced, that takes into account aspirations of all nations, large and small, developed and developing, but, above all, let us bear in mind that this exercise is not about the prestige of any individual country or group of countries. It is about the prestige and effectiveness of our Organization.

Mr. Donokusumo (Indonesia): It is most gratifying for my delegation to note that the deliberations in the Open-ended Working Group during the past five years on the question of expansion and reform of the Security Council have, so far, resulted in progress in some areas of interest to Member States. Chief among them has been the recognition that an increase in its membership must reflect the vastly increased membership of the Organization and take into account the significant changes that have taken place in the international arena. It should also encompass the current geopolitical realities, lead to the Council's democratization and confer greater legitimacy on its decisions. Thus, the culmination of our efforts should lead to a revamped Security Council that can effectively meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Beyond this paradigm, however, and notwithstanding strenuous and dedicated efforts, it is undeniable that the discussions in the Working Group have been stymied over a myriad of issues, most notably the size and scope of its expansion and its modalities, the election of new permanent members and equitable representation for the developing countries, decision-making and accountability. These have so far defied a rational solution and cannot be brushed aside. The numerous proposals that have been submitted do not as yet constitute a workable hypothesis from which to proceed further and to seek an acceptable solution. This is because some of them were deemed inequitable and discriminatory and, hence, non-starters, while others call for further clarification and elucidation.

Clearly, therefore, a general agreement has so far eluded us, because of fundamental differences on the issues involved. Consequently, the mandate entrusted to the Working Group remains unfulfilled.

The fact that reform of the Security Council has been long overdue and has become urgent should not lead us to hasty and ill-considered solutions which will call into question the integrity and credibility of the reform process. In my delegation's view, that would constitute a flawed approach which is unlikely to contribute to the strengthening of the Security Council, to which we are all committed.

For these reasons, my delegation calls for a continuation of the Working Group's deliberations in addressing the unresolved issues and in narrowing our differences. We are committed to achieving further progress under its auspices and have full confidence in the effective discharge of its mandate. However, we are also acutely aware of continuing differences on many substantive issues, which have persisted. Hence, it is not tenable to adopt an expeditious approach in seeking agreements of a comprehensive nature while papering over these differences and disagreements.

This is precisely the reason why Indonesia has endorsed the call for taking the time that is necessary so that we can endeavour to reach a general agreement. It is fully in conformity with the position taken by the ministerial meeting of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries held in New York last September, which unequivocally expressed its opposition to an imposed time-frame. The communiqué issued by the meeting along with those by the Organization of African Unity and the Ibero-American meetings held last summer should constitute reference guides for our future endeavours.

It is self-evident that the complex set of issues attendant upon the question of expansion and reform of the Security Council is not amenable to a general agreement at this point of time, which has rendered imperative the renewal of dialogue for a thorough discussion of all the questions without an artificial acceleration of the whole process. That would afford an opportunity not only to undertake a review and reappraisal of the proposals already submitted, but also to consider new proposals such as two new permanent members for the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. And it would also deal with Article 108 of the Charter, which will surely be invoked in the event of amendments and whose centrality and sanctity must be preserved. Its faithful and consistent implementation must be ensured in the context of the restructuring of the Security Council.

In conclusion, Mr. President, my delegation is deeply indebted to you for your role in facilitating assurances from interested Member States that:

> "we will not be taking any decisions on this item at this stage of its consideration."

You have thus paved the way for a fuller discussion of all the issues involved and for a democratic decision by the General Assembly. This augurs well for our future endeavours in seeking well thought out and balanced decisions.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): For the fourth consecutive year, the Assembly is meeting to consider the report of the Open-ended Working Group on the question of equitable representation of and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council. This indicates the great importance of what is at stake and the complexity of the question of reform of this powerful decision-making organ of the Organization.

Since the General Assembly decided to establish the Open-ended Working Group on reform of the Security Council in 1993, every delegation here has devoted a great deal of energy to thinking about the issue and a great deal of time to seeking points of agreement in an attempt to achieve the much desired reform of this central organ of the United Nations system in a spirit of harmony.

I am pleased to emphasize and welcome the commendable efforts of States individually and groups of States collectively to make their valuable contributions to this joint thought process.

The presentation last March by the outgoing President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Razali, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Working Group, of documents summarizing the proposals of Member States, and the relevant decisions adopted by the Ministerial Conference of the Movement of the Non-Aligned Countries in New Delhi and the Organization of African Unity Summit in Harare, as well as the American proposals on the reform of the Council, are, in the view of my delegation, major steps forward stages and provide a perfect illustration of our collective commitment to promoting conditions for a significant breakthrough in our work.

However, there is no denying that despite these concrete, commendable efforts, prospects for complete and comprehensive reform of the Security Council to make it a modern, democratic and transparent organ are still an objective, a goal that is yet to be reached. Indeed, many questions are pending, in particular those relating to the expansion of the two categories of membership of the Council, the composition of the Council, the use of the right of veto, improvement of the Council's working methods, and the question of periodic review.

With regard to expansion, there can be no doubt that there are still marked differences between those advocating an expansion in both categories and those proposing an expansion limited only to the category of non-permanent members.

In this debate, we Africans have proposed and insist upon an expansion of the Council in both categories of members, and the granting to Africa of at least two permanent and two non-permanent seats, which would be apportioned to African countries on the basis of decisions by the Africans themselves, through a system of rotation based on criteria which are specific to Africa.

In this regard, the African Group will soon present a document on the concept and modalities of that rotation and its application to the permanent seats. In my view, this document is a major contribution to the efforts of our Working Group and deserves to be studied by the countries of the Group which are interested in this concept.

Once again, my delegation feels that the formula for this rotation is an African recipe. It is a system drawn from African wisdom, and which as such cannot be exported.

Turning to the question of the composition of the future Council, my delegation has always expressed the hope of achieving a dynamic compromise on the two current positions — that of democratization in representation, which presupposes a Council expanded to 26 members, and that of effectiveness in the functioning of the Council, which would reduce that number to 21. The dynamic compromise we seek, if it is to be achieved, should not occur to the detriment of the interests of our continent of Africa.

I am certain that the Chairman of the African Group, or the representative of Zimbabwe, whose country currently holds the presidency of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), will speak during the discussion to set out the African position on Security Council reform in detail.

On the issue of the veto, we have noted the resistance in some quarters, especially among certain permanent members, to accepting changes with respect both to the limitation and the elimination of the right of veto which has, in the eyes of the majority of States, become an anachronistic right.

On the basis of the principle that debates dealing with the expansion of the Council and the application of the right of veto could lead to a real blockage of all our discussions, last April I put forward, on behalf of my delegation, the idea of engaging in an in-depth debate on the question of the veto with the permanent members, in order to reach an agreement with them on modifications which, by common consent, could be made to the scope of application of the veto.

At that time, I advocated entrusting the study of the delicate and complex question of the veto to a restricted but open committee made up of certain designated ambassadors within the Working Group, whose mandate would be to focus exclusively on an overall in-depth study of the question of the right of veto, bearing in mind the views of the permanent members and the numerous ideas developed by Member States in the debates.

To my mind, this committee on the veto should work at the same time a the high-level Working Group sessions, so that the conclusions to be submitted to the broader Working Group will fit smoothly into a general agreement on the reform of the Security Council. I believe that this approach elicited some interest, and I am happy to note today that this idea has made some headway and could be taken up again in the framework of our future negotiations.

Once the scope of application of the veto has been defined and accepted, the privilege of using that power should, in my delegation's view, belong to all permanent members, both the current ones and the new ones.

During our debates, many delegations have also put forward useful suggestions for improvements in the Council's methods of work which, if applied, would ensure greater transparency and legitimacy in this central organ of the system. Commendable efforts have already been carried out along these lines. They deserve to be followed up on, and the measures recommended should be institutionalized.

Likewise, and with a view to allowing the Security Council to adapt and play its full role as described in the Charter, it seems to me essential to establish a system of periodic review that would take world developments into account. To my mind, and as I understand it, only the length of the review period remains the subject of some differences of opinion, which I consider to be surmountable if the political will exists.

The work of reforming the Security Council calls for an innovative and responsible approach on the part of the Member States, bearing in mind the very special interest given to this organ. The high-level Working Group on the reform of the Security Council has made considerable progress, even if consensus has yet to be achieved on such fundamental points as expansion, composition and the right of veto.

In my delegation's view, this is the time to appeal for a redoubling of our efforts and imagination and to make maximum use of the momentum created by our discussions, so as to achieve our objective of restructuring the Security Council as soon as possible.

My delegation therefore supports the recommendation made by the Working Group whereby the General Assembly would allow it to continue its work during this fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, my delegation feels that the present work on reforming the Security Council is a historic opportunity, in the wake of the reform of 1965. For us, the countries of Africa, this is the only opportunity we have to be better represented within this organ. My country therefore feels that we should not be obliged to lose this chance to become future permanent and non-permanent members of this organ, which is invested with genuine decision-making power within the system.

It must be acknowledged that there are still problems to be solved, compromises to be reached, and reconciliation to be achieved. Let us be brave enough to say so. But let us also agree, in good faith, to move forward by capitalizing on the points of convergence and preserving what has been achieved and the momentum created, so as to bring to a harmonious and reasonably speedy conclusion our joint inquiry into the important issue which has been entrusted to us.

Mr. Tello (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Today, the General Assembly is considering the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council. This topic has undoubtedly occupied an important place in reflections on United Nations reform, and has attracted the attention of public opinion.

Only a few months ago, when it concluded its deliberations on the subject for 1997, the General Assembly had the opportunity of examining the report submitted to it by the Open-ended Working Group dealing with the matter. The Assembly adopted without a vote the draft decision contained in paragraph 10 of document A/51/47, recommending that the Group continue its work during the present session. The delegation of Mexico joined in that consensus, and it is now offering to participate actively in the discussion of this important subject when the Working Group meets again in 1998.

Throughout our deliberations, Mexico's participation in the Working Group has been consistent with the position we have taken since the composition and decision-making methods of the Security Council were discussed in 1945 during the San Francisco Conference.

As the documents of the Conference which gave birth to our Organization attest, even then Mexico was not in favour of creating the category of permanent members of the Security Council. We believed then, and we continue to believe today, as was recalled by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico during the general debate at this session, that this division

> "establishes a discriminatory situation — a situation which is exacerbated by the permanent members having been given the right of the veto". [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 9th meeting, p. 24]

The political circumstances in 1945 compelled us to accept that in an Organization based on the principle of the sovereign equality of States, five of its Members would enjoy a higher status with special rights and prerogatives.

In line with this position of principle, by which we have stood since 1945, the Mexican delegation submitted in 1995 a specific proposal on the enlargement of the Security Council for consideration by the Working Group. That proposal, which is being circulated in this Hall today, provides for an increase of five members, all of them in the non-permanent category. I wish to reaffirm here that our suggestion remains on the table awaiting substantive consideration.

We have been asked why we continue to insist that the increase in the composition of the Council should be confined solely and exclusively to the category of non-permanent members. The reasons we gave at the time we submitted our proposal remain valid. We are convinced that the Council needs to be enlarged to reflect the current composition of the Organization and, at the same time, to ensure that it is an organ that acts efficiently and effectively while being more transparent and, above all, more democratic.

We know that there are a number of countries, led by the so-called pretenders, that argue that the best way of reflecting the present world situation as this century draws to a close can only be through an increase in the number of permanent members of the Security Council. The reason, we are told without further justification, will confer greater legitimacy on its decisions. Nevertheless, they have not been able and, indeed, are not able to explain why a Council with 10 permanent members would be more efficient. They do not tell us why a Security Council with 10 permanent members would be more effective. Nor are they able to explain why a Security Council with 10 permanent members would act more transparently than it does at present. And they are of course unable to convince us — because there are no arguments to support their case — that a Security Council with twice the number of States holding the immense power and privileges enjoyed by permanent members would be more democratic.

If we limit ourselves to the best-known possibility and conduct an analysis of the configuration of the Security Council with the so-called pretenders included, the result would be to undermine the principles enshrined in the Charter, which we all maintain to be of special importance, such as those establishing the sovereign equality of States, equity and geographical distribution.

If the so-called pretenders were to realize their dream of becoming new permanent members, we would then have a Security Council in which the European Union, made up of 15 States, would have three permanent members. It must not be forgotten that the European Union, which undoubtedly represents a new factor in international relations, aspires not only to a single currency but also to the establishment of a common foreign and defence policy. Of course, we wish the European countries every success in achieving the goal of integration they have set for themselves. What cannot be explained is why, in the same context, they feel the need to have, not one, not two, but three permanent members.

Since 1991 we have been teaching our children that the cold war is over. We welcome that fact, but we wonder why the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a military alliance now made up of 16 countries that was established in the context of bipolar confrontation, wants to have four permanent members.

A still more illogical projection is what would happen to the group of States known as the Group of Eight. This handful of countries would have six permanent members. Six of its eight members would belong to the privileged category. In this scenario, we would have a Security Council in which the privileged group would be predominantly European and, obviously, developed. Is that genuine geographical balance? Whatever happened to the principle of equity and representativeness? It is totally ignored in this new composition.

Finally, I wish to reiterate emphatically that for Mexico it is unacceptable that, as we approach the end of the century, an attempt should be made to increase the number of States enjoying the privilege of the enormous power that the Charter confers on the permanent members of the Security Council.

We do not believe there is any justification whatsoever for establishing new power centres in our Organization. We have said so before, and we repeat it now. We are convinced that the five States to which the Charter assigned special status — by a majority decision, not a unanimous one, in San Francisco — are more than enough.

If we really want to make progress on resolving this issue, we shall have to devise equitable and non-discriminatory mechanisms that are acceptable to all. We again urge the pretenders to give up their ambitions and act in accordance with the spirit of democracy and equity that should be the lifeblood of international relations at the end of the century.

I should like now to refer briefly to the most obvious exceptional power conferred by the Charter on the permanent members of the Security Council. This is, of course, what in legal terms is called the rule of unanimity of the permanent members, and is generally known as the privilege of the veto.

We have learned to live with the injustice of a provision that we had to accept in San Francisco and that we were assured would maintain unity among the victors of the Second World War. In fact, however, the veto did not serve this purpose. The rivalry between the Powers was apparent from the very inception of our Organization, and for many years their antagonism even prevented the admission of new members to the United Nations. More than 20 States, victims of a confrontation that had nothing to do with them, had their entry unnecessarily postponed. It may be noted, as an interesting footnote, that among them are the main pretenders to a higher category and to the privilege that did them so much harm in the past.

In San Francisco, Mexico was opposed to the granting of the veto. In a one-sided struggle, the appetites and ambitions of the Powers won out over the voices of reason and equity. Subsequently, Mexico consistently opposed the indiscriminate utilization of that prerogative, the abuse of which, as my country's Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out in the general debate, many times prevented the Council from performing its most essential work.

In San Francisco, Mexico supported Australia's proposal that the scope of the veto should be confined to measures undertaken on the basis of Chapter VII of the Charter. At that time the winners of the Second World War also frustrated that attempt to moderate the exercise of the veto power. Now, half a century later, we urge them to reconsider that attitude. Unilateralism must give way to and make room for the collective aspirations to equality and democracy.

The process of enlarging the Security Council has its own rhythm. A solution cannot be rushed. The Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and, at the Latin American level, the Rio Group have all spoken out at the highest level in favour of giving time for reflection, so as to arrive at the "general agreement" referred to in the General Assembly resolution that established the Working Group. Echoing the voice of the vast majority, Mexico's Minister for Foreign Affairs stated in the general debate:

> "The issue is too important to be dealt with hastily." [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 9th meeting, p. 25]

We reaffirm our conviction that the reform of the Security Council should be a project that unites us, not an issue that divides us. It is not a question of a source of national prestige, nor of a way of strengthening regional hegemony. Rather than special agendas, what should guide our efforts is the interest of the United Nations. We need a reform that will promote unity of leadership and purpose in the Organization and not weaken the factors that give stability and cohesion to matters of general interest.

Let us work to build an efficient, effective, transparent and democratic Security Council that reflects the interests of all regions without discrimination, without special statuses or exclusive privileges. Only in this way will the objective of adapting the Council to present circumstances be attained. Only in this way will its decisions have legitimacy and representativeness.

In the search for a Security Council of that kind, the Working Group can count on the active and resolute participation of Mexico.

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): The fact that so many delegations can muster the energy to speak once again on this item, on the issue of Security Council reform, constitutes undeniable proof of our collective resolve to advance the issue in spite of the considerable conceptual gaps that still exist between various positions. What unites all Member States is a broad feeling that expansion of the Council and revision of its working methods is urgently required in order to ensure for the future its representative character and legitimacy.

Like those of most other Member States, the Austrian position on Security Council reform has been expressed in detail over the last four years. Our views have been incorporated in a working document that we submitted together with Belgium and a number of other Member States. That paper is reproduced in document A/49/965.

We believe that expansion should occur in both categories — permanent and non-permanent — and that the balance in the composition of the Council between permanent and non-permanent membership should be maintained within an overall number not exceeding 25. The representative character of the Council depends not only on the number of permanent members but also on the specific contributions non-permanent members have consistently made over the years to the work of the Council. New ideas and new approaches have again and again been initiated by non-permanent members, and more often than not, these members have also made valuable efforts to maintain the necessary liaison with the vast majority of United Nations Members not serving on the Council.

Expansion of membership in both categories will have to ensure a better representation of developing countries. Thus, while we support the interest of Japan and Germany in serving as permanent members, we equally support parallel interests from qualified countries of the South. Expansion in the non-permanent category will, by and large, have to follow recognized principles of geographic distribution.

We advocate a curtailment of the veto power, ideally limiting it to actions under Chapter VII, and do not wish to see more prominence being given to this instrument through the expansion of the category of permanent membership.

We strongly support efforts to further increase transparency in the working methods of the Council and enhanced possibilities for non-member States to have their views heard.

Finally, we believe that a periodic review of the composition of the Council would also help maintain its representative character for the future. Such a review should examine whether potential future changes in international relations should and could be reflected through further structural changes in the composition of the membership.

It must be obvious to everybody following this debate that more efforts will be needed to construct bridges between various national and group positions. While we maintain the view that our position, as outlined, marks the middle ground and thus should help us in the search for a compromise, we realize that at this stage further innovative thinking might be needed. In this context, let me pay special tribute to President Razali for his valuable contribution to this process. Likewise, let me thank the two Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group for their relentless efforts. The fact that today we have not yet arrived at agreement on Security Council reform is certainly not due to any lack of energy or devotion to this issue on their part.

I assume that we all want to move forward towards constructing an expanded Security Council with strengthened capacity and effectiveness, enhanced representative character and improved working efficiency. After all, this appears as the major conclusion in the report of the Working Group.

In order to do so, I believe we should ponder a number of questions which, even after four years of intensive discussions, would profit from further clarification and subsequent negotiations. I should like to mention three of these issues: overall size of the Council, decision-making process and rotating permanent membership.

With regard to size, we need to arrive at an understanding on the acceptable outer limits of expansion. This number will have to go beyond the conservative attitudes expressed by some of the current permanent members if we want to generate sufficient support for an expansion model. At the same time, the number will have to stay below certain maximum figures if we want — as we must, by virtue of Article 108 of the Charter — to positively engage all the permanent members in the ratification process.

With regard to the decision-making process, the most difficult compromises are yet to be found. We would suggest that a combination of measures to reduce the veto power of current permanent members and an appropriate definition of the action threshold in a newly constituted enlarged Council might be a road worthy of further exploration.

Finally, on rotating permanent membership, I do not wish to hide the fact that my delegation still has certain difficulties with this concept, as do others. However, should this be the key to the magic solution we seem to be looking for, I believe the concept would and could then gain sufficient support; but for that to happen further explanations will be necessary.

Under Article 24, paragraph 1, of the Charter, the Members of the United Nations confer upon the Security Council the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and agree that in the discharge of this duty the Council acts on their behalf. What can be done to reconcile this concept with systems of regional rotation? In the most likely case — that future permanent members will not enjoy veto powers — can one envisage permanent members without the two main characteristics of permanent membership? If so, what can be done to minimize this obvious inconsistency?

I have tried to pinpoint some of the more important issues that, in our view, still need further elaboration. Other delegations have referred to similar or other issues. I believe that this should not disappoint or discourage us. It should not come as a surprise that a major undertaking of this kind needs sustained efforts by all interested delegations.

After four years of fairly intensive debate, my delegation remains interested in seeing a swift result of our deliberations. Discussions until now have resulted in the widely held view that the current composition of the Council is no longer representative and that the Council therefore lacks legitimacy. This situation is unhealthy. It needs to be redressed. Hence, our interest in seeing reform of the Council brought about as soon as feasible.

Mr. Sharma (India): As the reform session of the General Assembly begins its consideration of a cardinal aspect of the reform of the United Nations, I would like to pay tribute, Mr. President, to the sagacity with which you have ventured to clear the atmosphere that seemed to have clouded consideration of the item pertaining to the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters.

We welcome your reappointment of the Bureau of the Open-ended Working Group and your decision to have it resume its work early next year. It is reassuring that we shall continue to benefit from the guidance and diligence of Ambassador Breitenstein and Ambassador Jayanama when the Group tries once more to bring its mandate to fruition.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The imperatives of reform of the Security Council are well recognized. The challenge that faces us now is to translate the identifiable consensus that exists in favour of Security Council reform to a general agreement on the nature and modalities of the reform exercise. Expansion of the membership, improvement of the working methods and changes in decision-making procedures have been widely identified as essential ingredients of the comprehensive package of reform.

We unanimously agreed at the last session that we should continue building on the work done during previous sessions. It is therefore incumbent on us to continue the process of developing a widely shared perspective during the current session in a sustained and objective manner. Such an exercise will carry weight by being transparent, participative and devoid of suspicion and distrust.

India's position on the variety of issues related to this subject reflects our willingness to proceed in an objective manner. On the issue of expansion, we have held that it is an objective reality that the ratio of the Security Council membership to the General Assembly membership has declined from 1 to 4.6 at the time of the adoption of the United Nations Charter, to 1 to 12.33 today. The ratio of permanent Security Council members to the General Assembly membership has declined from 1 to 10 in 1945 to 1 to 37 now. The present permanent members of the Council have a combined population of about 1.8 billion. This leaves two thirds of the world's population without representation in the permanent category in an Organization whose Charter was framed in the name of "the peoples of the United Nations".

Mr. Abu-Nimah (Jordan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Imbalance in the permanent membership of the Security Council arises not only from the exclusion of an overwhelming section of the world population, but also from the disproportionately high representation of a particular group of countries. This situation needs to be alleviated rather than accentuated. Developing countries need to be represented equitably in the permanent category. The Prime Minister of India, in his address before the current session of the General Assembly, emphasizing this need, stated:

> "In this way the decisions of the Council will truly reflect the wider membership of the United Nations. Otherwise, the Council's actions will be seen as progressively less representative at a time when it is being called upon to act far more frequently than before on behalf of the world community". [See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 9th meeting]

This need is all the more pressing in the era of globalization that is upon us, when the affairs of the world are being woven together more closely than ever before.

The expansion of the Security Council must equip it to face the challenges of the next millennium. An inclusive approach would strengthen it. Any attempt to exclude developing countries from the highest echelon of the Council's membership would weaken its credibility and support for its actions.

To us, as to a vast majority, the requirement of an expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent categories is self-evident. The creation of intermediate subsidiary categories will not address the central issue of correcting the imbalance within the permanent category of the Council itself, which is what we are mandated to rectify. It will perpetuate the imbalance, the recognition of which is the starting point of this reform exercise, rather than redress it.

India has always held that a normative approach, which brings coherence to the debate, should guide the exercise of reform of the Security Council. The aim is to achieve a broad-based rather than a piecemeal expansion. This can be encouraged if criteria are discussed so that a uniform perspective informs the appreciation of what is involved in expanded permanent membership. Elements relevant here would be the share of humanity represented by a country; geographical spread; size and potential of the economy; contributions within the United Nations system as a whole, and particularly to peacekeeping; an independent and constructive engagement in world affairs; and, to meet the challenges of the approaching millennium, the evolving potential of a State. During the general debate, other Member States also emphasized the need to orient the exchanges before us towards a consideration of criteria. Perhaps it would be useful to pursue this path further when the Working Group resumes next year. It would ensure a non-discriminatory approach and develop a uniform perspective, principles to which we have committed ourselves.

The General Assembly is the most representative organ of the United Nations. This indeed is the forum where the choice of any new permanent members should be made without any precondition or any predetermination. Resolution 48/26 called for an expansion of the Security Council to be based on general agreement. This was affirmed by the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held at New Delhi last April, as well as by the recent meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement held in New York in September. The idea of consensus at a regional or group level cannot therefore be relevant.

Reform of the Security Council is not only a matter of evolution in its composition and size but also an opportunity for reviewing its working methods so as to provide for enhanced transparency, greater accountability to the general membership of the United Nations through a more purposeful relationship with the General Assembly, and a new understanding of its decision-making procedures. The Non-Aligned Movement has provided constructive suggestions on the entire array of issues under this rubric. There has been substantial convergence of views on a variety of measures. We hope that the forthcoming discussions in the Working Group will also lead to further progress on how to proceed with the institutionalizing of agreed measures.

Non-discrimination is an ideal that has imbued our approach on all aspects of Security Council reform. Any new understanding of decision-making procedures and veto needs to be in conformity with this guiding principle.

Finally, any package that we arrive at would, of necessity, be subject to an appropriate review, not because it is the first step in a long-drawn process, but because constructive adaptation to change is essential to preserve the effectiveness of any organization, particularly one representative of the entire world community.

There is a clear and categorical national consensus in India, cutting across the entire political spectrum, that India could appropriately shoulder the responsibilities of permanent membership in an expanded United Nations Security Council. India's position on this was declared initially in 1994 and reiterated recently by Prime Minister Shri Inder Kumar Gujral in his address to the General Assembly plenary. The Prime Minister reaffirmed that India is prepared to bear in full the responsibilities of permanent membership.

Permanent members are expected to bring with them a global vision and global responsibilities. From the earliest days of the United Nations, India has been instrumental in placing on its agenda issues on which it has had the most success, including decolonization, apartheid and human rights. Permanent members have a special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. India has shown a constant commitment to this objective since independence. Since the creation of the United Nations, India has been a leading contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, including in the most complex operations in Korea, the Congo and Somalia.

This year we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence. We have come a long way since 1947. For the past five decades, we have developed progressively effective national capabilities and self-reliance over a wide range of sectors, particularly in the national economy, diverse areas of advanced science and technology, and human-resource development. All this and much more has been achieved within the framework of a transparent and vibrant democracy. Our endeavour is to contribute to the overall international effort towards economic development, peace and stability.

Over the past five decades, India has been committed to forcefully articulating the concerns, priorities and perspectives of the developing world with reason, balance and a constructive orientation.

It is true that the process of reform of the Security Council has been under way for four years. However, the effort expended on this necessary venture has not been without success. We feel that some progress has been made, and we should continue assiduously to advance it. India will continue to be engaged actively and constructively in this endeavour.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from French*): Let me begin with sincere congratulations to Ambassador Breitenstein of Finland and Ambassador Jayanama of Thailand on their reappointment as co-Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council. By renewing its expression of confidence in them, the General Assembly has put on record its recognition of their tireless efforts in the service of the Group and, above all, for their patience.

Our debate on Security Council reform is taking place in a context marked in particular by the ongoing discussion of the Secretary-General's reform proposals. Here the General Assembly recently adopted a major resolution on a series of measures, and is about to pronounce itself on institutional reforms intended to chart a course for the modernization of the United Nations so that it will be better prepared to meet present and future challenges. However worthwhile and important it is, this effort will remain incomplete unless it is complemented by more substantial reform with the ultimate purpose of rewriting obsolete provisions of the Charter and modernizing institutions and relationships within the Organization that still reflect the logic and concerns of the world as it looked at the end of the Second World War.

Because it is at the centre of our system of collective security, and because it is the place for the expression of and, sometimes, for clashes between the interests and stakes of the powerful, the Security Council represents — along with reform of the Council — a test of our collective readiness to establish more democratic and more representative institutions and to build international relations that bear the stamp of justice and solidarity.

Since the General Assembly decided four years ago to debate this item in plenary meeting, delegations have traditionally sought in their statements to take stock of the results of the waning session and to look to the prospects for the future. The temptation to do this is all the greater today, because the present session has been especially eventful. It will be remembered as the session that most clearly demonstrated our inability to find a compromise satisfactory to all. It will be remembered also as the one that brought our frustrations into clearest focus.

We must acknowledge that no progress has been made on substantive issues. Whether on the size of the Council, its composition, the procedures for selecting new permanent members, or even more so the question of the veto, to name but a few, the gap between positions has grown deeper and wider, rather than narrowing thanks to desirable compromise. In part, this is because of the sensitive and complex nature of this exercise, and because of our ambitious effort to achieve genuine, across-the-board reform of the Council. Along with many others, my delegation has always favoured reform that would not be limited to a mere facelift or to a simple arithmetic process, like that which took place in 1965 — in this case increasing the number of seats on the Council from 15 to 24

With this in mind, my delegation has encouraged the Working Group to show imagination and to reflect seriously on innovative ideas. Here I note with great regret that the idea of rotating permanent seats, recommended by the African Group and endorsed by the Harare summit, has not been adequately explored. It is a viable approach which — contrary to what its detractors, who would confine it to a specific geographical arena, say — could respond to our wish for more equitable representation in the Council.

The lack of tangible progress on decisive questions relating to the enlargement of the Council should not make us forget the major achievements made on the second group of matters, relating to the working methods of the Security Council, which in our view are no less important. On these, the Working Group had very constructive and fruitful discussions, including on substantive matters such as the institutionalization of measures the Council itself has taken to increase transparency in its work and of additional measures suggested for the most part by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Moreover, it is undeniable that improvements in the Council's working methods and procedures have been the result of the pressure and positive influence that debate and discussion in the Working Group brought to bear on Council members. It is therefore important for this dynamic to continue in order to solidify and, above all, to consolidate these achievements.

The Working Group is ready to resume its work at the fifty-second session in a climate marked by growing impatience and frustration. It is clear that such a climate does not favour the dialogue that is necessary for a compromise that can win support from the broadest possible majority. We must therefore work to restore the conditions for open, calm debate, and must avoid any action that could further impair the climate or trigger useless and harmful divisions. In that connection, my delegation welcomes the fact that reason and a wish for the general interest to prevail have very recently carried the day over confrontation.

We must make it clear that the principles that should guide our discussions, as forcefully outlined by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by the Organization of African Unity, include rejecting the imposition of a deadline on the work of the Group while recognizing the need to arrive speedily at a satisfactory solution on the basis of general agreement. Because of the stakes and scope of this exercise and its impact on the future of the United Nations, we must act prudently and realistically, and must ensure that we act in the context of a genuine process of renewal and modernization of the Security Council, to which we all aspire.

Above and beyond the strict respect for the provisions of the Charter that is imperative in all circumstances and for all States — especially when it comes to amending the Charter — it is important today to ensure the cooperation and support of the greatest possible number of Member States, so as to secure the full meaning and breadth of Article 24 of the Charter.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): Five years have elapsed since the General Assembly asked the Secretary-General to launch the exercise on Security Council reform by submitting a questionnaire to all Member States. Almost four years to the day have gone by since the General Assembly established the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council. Yet today, as I speak, a solution still appears as elusive as ever. Positions remain far apart, very far apart.

The Working Group has spent the last nine months on the so-called Razali framework resolution, named after the former President of the General Assembly who fought a personal campaign to promote it. The core of his latest proposal is that two new permanent seats be given to industrialized countries and three to the developing nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. This puts the three regions between two alternatives: the improbability of one country from each continent being selected, and the likelihood of permanent rotating seats. In other words, the "quick fix", which the "great pretenders" say they don't want but re-propose by deed if not by word.

Nobody has yet been able to explain to me the difference between permanent rotating seats without the veto power and regular non-permanent seats. In substance, the Razali proposal would grant two real permanent seats, with full rights and privileges, even if without the veto yet, to industrialized countries, in exchange for three pseudo-permanent seats to the nations of the South. I ask: how can anyone imagine that developing countries would accept such an exchange, perpetuating — no, aggravating — the present situation?

Currently all five permanent members are from the world's northern hemisphere and are industrialized, or on the verge of becoming so. Under the Razali system, that number would grow from five to seven, with no real, true permanent seats going to the southern hemisphere. As the President of the Italian Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, said in this Hall in April of last year:

> "An Olympus of powerful countries could widen the gap and thus reduce the interest of the excluded, demeaning their political commitment in the process and perhaps marginalizing them and giving them the dangerous feeling that they are token presences, mere spectators of the decision taken by others." [See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings*, 103rd meeting]

The very idea of permanent seats is rooted in international realities which prevailed at the end of the Second World War. As our Mexican colleague, Ambassador Manuel Tello, reminded us this morning, even then the idea did not seem to enjoy vast popularity.

When the United Nations Charter was drafted in San Francisco, only 30 of the 51 original members — that is, barely more than half — voted in favour of establishing permanent members of the Security Council, who could block forever, in perpetuity, any challenge to their status through the veto. While the winners of the Second World War may have succeeded in imposing such a solution back then, it does not mean they can do it again today.

In the last half century, the world has changed, and changed profoundly. Back in 1945, the great majority of countries present in this Hall today were still colonies. Now they are all sovereign, fully independent nations. And like all Member States, they treasure their sovereignty, perhaps more than anyone else. The new nations are certainly in no mood to submit to the virtual hegemony of another country, no matter how big, on their own continents. No one is ready to dilute his sovereignty in any way, fashion or style. As our colleague from Spain, Ambassador Inocencio Arias, is fond of saying: "No one really wants to act like Esau, who sold his birthright for a plate of lentils".

From the beginning, we Italians have maintained that the Razali proposal was inadequate. The same applies to the offspring of that proposal, announced by the United States in July. Both the Razali proposal and its American offspring would leave us with three categories of permanent members: permanent members with the veto, permanent members without the veto and pseudo-permanent members from developing countries — and, of course, the non-permanent members become relegated to a fourth-class category. Some of you may recall the immediate reaction in the Working Group, when this formula was announced, of the former Ambassador of India, Prakash Shah, who said: "If the developing countries rotate, so must the industrialized nations". And if I may remind you all, the principle of universal rotation is the main-stay, the very basis, of the Italian proposal for reform of the Security Council.

The Ambassador of Egypt, Nabil Elaraby, underlined last year that rotation solutions:

> "would give a larger number of countries in all regions the opportunity to assume, in turn, the responsibility of Security Council membership, thereby strengthening its role and credibility".

The pretenders to new permanent seats have claimed that a solution is "tantalizingly close". I fail to be tantalized. The truth is that on the basis of the informal, confidential consultations conducted by the co-Vice-Chairmen with Member States at the beginning of this year, the faulty assumption arose that everyone in this room was ready to accept new permanent seats of any kind.

What I believe happened is as follows: in the darkness of the confessional box, Member States were asked, "Do you want an increase in permanent seats?"

The answer, of course, was "Yes". How could it have been otherwise, since, for instance, 52 Heads of State or Government of the African countries have already agreed that they want two permanent seats, with the veto, for their continent. But if the Permanent Representatives of those 52 African countries had been asked whether they would be willing to accept only one pseudo-permanent seat, without the veto, I am sure the response would have been a resounding "No".

The time has come to seal the confessional box and consider only the positions that have been expressed in the light of day and for all to see in the Open-ended Working Group — the one and only place where Member States can make their positions clearly known to the Chairman and to each other on this crucial issue.

My delegation, the delegation of Italy, has been accused of favouring the status quo. This is simply not true. Our only aim has been, and remains, to firmly oppose unfair and discriminatory proposals. This was best put by my friend Ambassador Kamal of Pakistan, who last year said,

> "any increase in the permanent membership would serve the interests of only a few countries and would be to the detriment of small and medium-sized countries, which constitute the overwhelming majority of the membership of the United Nations." [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Plenary Meetings*, 49th meeting, p. 2]

We continue to strongly believe that Security Council reform is long overdue. This is why we have presented our own proposal, modified it in response to helpful suggestions and kept it on the table. As the Assembly knows, it has received statements of support or interest from a good 81 countries. We know that this support is not sufficient, since it falls short of the 124 votes that we firmly believe are needed for approval of any Security Council expansion. But maybe now the wind has changed, since it has become widely recognized that if the developing countries are forced to rotate, industrialized countries must also rotate. So perhaps the Italian proposal could come on stage again.

As the Foreign Minister of Italy, Mr. Lamberto Dini, said in his addresses to the General Assembly, Italy is willing to examine and support other formulas that are not incompatible with the principles upon which our own is based: democracy, real equitable geographic representation, effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. Another possibility, of course, is the fall-back position of the Non-Aligned Movement, which calls for an increase, for the time being, only in the non-permanent seats in the event that no agreement can be reached on the other categories of membership.

This leads me to our reasons for joining 21 other sponsors in presenting draft resolution A/52/L.7, which, I would once again like to underline, is of a procedural nature. Some have said that we are sending the wrong message and are pushing an aggressive approach. The exact opposite is true. As a very distinguished colleague noted, ours was simply a measure of "preventive diplomacy". It addresses three basic issues: first, the need to avoid any imposed time-frame until general agreement has been reached; secondly, the quorum required to pass any enlargement of the Security Council; and thirdly, the need to continue discussion of the question in the Open-ended Working Group, to give all Member States the chance to fully participate.

Let me elaborate briefly on these three points. With regard to the first one, we have been called by some the "inertia group". In reality, we have always maintained that reform is a matter of urgent attention, but not at the cost of sacrificing general agreement. After we submitted draft resolution A/52/L.7, Italy was asked to withdraw its support, sometimes in rather robust terms, as were others among the 22 sponsors. We resisted this suggestion. To prove our point, we insisted to the President of the General Assembly that the Working Group be reconvened in the second half of January, at the latest. The other side sought to postpone discussion until as late as March or even April, and even to cancel today's debate — a debate which, I am sure, will prove how deeply divided the membership still is on the issue. We needed only to listen to those who spoke before me to realize how true this is.

The second point, the necessary quorum to approve any reform or expansion, is by far the most important of the three issues. Again and again, every side has repeatedly argued that we need general agreement. But what kind of threshold is meant by "general agreement"? Certainly not less than two thirds of the Member States. Nobody, but nobody, I believe, could argue that such a number could be no lower than 124 votes, the same number prescribed by Article 108 for resolutions amending the Charter.

Frankly, I believe that our procedural draft resolution has a great merit: it has revealed the true intentions of the great pretenders and some of their our gratitude to Ambassador Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee for their excellent report, which reflects the Committee's untiring efforts to record the destructive effects of the unjust practices and measures of the Israeli occupation on the social, economic and political situation of the Palestinian people and on the peace process in the Middle East, as well as to keep the international community informed of the basic elements of the question of Palestine and its development.

In 1947, at its second session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which divided Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish. That resolution that was the basis of a whole series of important resolutions adopted subsequently over the course of the past 50 years, which were designed to find a solution to the question of Palestine. By way of example, I would like to mention General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948, which dealt with the refugee problem, Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which requested Israel to withdraw its armed forces from occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, and resolution 338 (1973), which called for the parties to the conflict to start negotiations aimed at settling the problem and mobilized the attention of the international community. A number of other resolutions have reaffirmed the Arab character of Al-Quds al-Sharif.

We are constantly concerned by the fact that, notwithstanding all those resolutions, on the basis of which the Madrid Peace Conference was organized and other agreements have been reached between the two parties, Palestinian and Israeli, notwithstanding the tireless efforts of the United Nations and its specialized agencies and those of regional States and bodies to help the Palestinian people attain the enjoyment of their just and inalienable rights, all of those initiatives have come up against Israel's pernicious policies, namely, the expansion of settlements and inhumane repression throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

Thus, the Palestinians continue to become displaced persons and refugees and to perish by the tens of thousands. In addition, national economic and social infrastructures have been destroyed with unprecedented criminal violations of humanitarian and moral principles and standards.

The disappointing results in the development of the question of Palestine and the complications encountered, which recently culminated in the illegal and illegitimate practices of the Israeli Government, have revealed to the entire world the true intentions of that Government, which strives to perpetuate its presence as occupying Power in the Palestinian and Arab territories by violence, hegemony and the illegal expansion of settlements and to fulfil its aggressive designs at the expense of the rights and the legitimate historical property of the Arab and Palestinian peoples.

Despite the results of the 1991 Madrid Conference, despite the 1993 Declaration of Principles and the other agreements reached between the two parties, Palestinian and Israeli, which represented a vital turning point and a propitious opportunity to arrive at a peaceful, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian problem, and while the majority of the world's countries were rejoicing, the peace process continued to suffer setbacks because of the Israeli Government's systematic and serious violations of the obligations under those arrangements and the other agreements it had entered into under the provisions of international law, the United Nations Charter, the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant international resolutions.

The entire world has unanimously recognized, on many occasions and in many regional and international bodies, and especially at successive meetings of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, that the Israeli Government's policy of confiscating Palestinian and Arab territories as well as the building of settlements in those territories, in particular in the Holy City Al-Quds, revered by all revealed religions, constitute flagrant violations by Israel of the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territories by force. It is also a matter of vital concern because a close study of the reports and relevant international statistics reveals that the rate and expansion of those settlements and their occupation by Jewish immigrants and settlers has doubled. Further, such practices have become even more arbitrary since the Government began to deal in an irresponsible manner with the Islamic Holy Places by opening a tunnel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the occupied part of Al-Quds and the unprecedented establishment of a settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim south of Al-Quds as well as in other occupied Arab and Palestinian territories.

In addition, Israel is refusing to grant resident permits to native born citizens and is confiscating their lands and natural resources by means of expulsion, violence and the falsification of Palestinian property documentation in an attempt to alter the legal status and demographic composition of that Arab and Islamic Holy

City and of other occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, imposing a policy of fait accompli that is null and void and is rejected not only by the Palestinian people but by all the world's States and peoples who want to see peace and stability prevail in our Arab region.

For the last two years, the whole world has watched the increasing insecurity and the escalation of tension, violence and mistrust in the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories. Not by chance, these developments have coincided with the intensification of Israeli actions that make crystal clear that Israel is waffling, refusing to respect its obligations and commitments, in particular those involved in furthering the redeployment of its troops from the West Bank, the implementation of its programme for releasing hundreds of Palestinian and Arab detainees and prisoners and the re-opening of the Gaza airport and port. Further, Israel is constantly delaying the final status talks, including in particular the resolution of critical questions regarding Al-Quds, the refugees, settlements and borders.

Justifying its iron-fist policies on false security pretences, Israel is tightening the noose around the occupied territories by surrounding them, by imposing blockades and collective economic and other punishments on the towns and villages and by undertaking campaigns of violence, making arbitrary arrests and assassinating innocent civilians randomly and without justification. These actions comprise a great many flagrant violations of human rights and of Israel's obligations under the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and other instruments of international humanitarian law, and under the Madrid Peace Conference and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace.

The United Arab Emirates has always condemned all these illegal Israeli actions and their dangerous consequences. These actions have destabilized — indeed, undermined — the very foundations of the peace accords and the confidence-building measures undertaken with the Palestinian side. Therefore, we would like to reaffirm here the need for the international community — as represented by the United Nations, the two co-sponsors of the peace process and the European Union — to redouble its efforts to lead the Israeli Government to comply with the resolutions of international law.

The actions required include, in particular, the calling of an emergency meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to examine Israel's violations of its terms, as well as ways and means of convincing Israel to desist from these violations and to observe in full the just requirements for the comprehensive and final resolution of the Palestinian question. These requirements include the immediate cessation of all illegal settlement activities in Al-Quds and in all the other Arab and Palestinian occupied territories, the dismantling of all the existing settlements, progress in the meeting of Israel's obligations regarding the re-opening of the Gaza port and airport, the implementation of the plan for the redeployment of the Israeli troops from the West Bank and the immediate release of all the detainees. The Palestinian National Authority should also have the opportunity to receive financial support from the international community. It should have the power to build the Palestinian economy unhindered, and its development agencies should be allowed to carry out their work so that they can meet their responsibilities to improve the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people.

Finally, today, when the United Nations is celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the United Arab Emirates would like to renew its support for the Palestinian people and its leaders as they struggle for freedom. We reaffirm that a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question requires the implementation of the essential principles embodied in the resolutions of international legitimacy along with the institution of the confidence-building measures stipulated in the peace accords. Basically, these measures comprise the immediate cessation of illegal settlement building and the dismantling of existing settlements so as to allow the Palestinian people to be free and to enjoy the rights to return to their homes, to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State on their territory with its capital at Al-Quds. And all this should be on the basis of peace, security and sustainable development.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers tomorrow, Tuesday, 2 December 1997, at 3 p.m.

The observer of Palestine has requested to make a statement in reply. I now call on him in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Today we had the pleasure of listening to the representative of Israel make a statement that contained so many hallucinations that we felt that he was talking about a completely different reality from the one we know, or is living in a different world: a world that has different definitions of right and justice; a world with its own special law which differs from the international law with which we are acquainted; a world in which the concept of equality among nations and peoples does not exist. Perhaps this is the world of God's chosen people. Indeed, it is not our world, the world of the ordinary peoples of Asia, Africa, South America and, perhaps, Europe — East and West.

It is difficult to believe such a level of arrogance, self-aggrandizement and disdain for the realities by which the political discourse of the present Israeli Government is characterized and of which today's statement is an excellent example.

Here, and very briefly, I wish to remind the Israeli representative of a few things in the hope that he might perceive the reality, in however limited a way. The heart of the issue is the occupation — Israel's occupation. The end of this occupation is the prerequisite for peace.

Secondly, any attempt to compare the illegal settlements in the occupied territories to the Palestinian villages and towns is not only a violation of international law, the resolutions of the Security Council and the bases of the peace process, but is in fact racist and vile. It is even more dangerous than that — it is an invitation to the Palestinian side to raise the subject of its rights in Jaffa, Haifa and other Palestinian cities.

Thirdly, talk of Israel's basic and vital needs reminds us of hateful theories that should not be recalled here. Real security can be achieved through a just peace, not through insistence on vital needs, which we entirely reject.

Fourthly, the Israeli side needs to remember that the Palestinian people is proudly equal to the Israeli people and is neither a follower nor an ethnic minority. Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories is not a concession on its part; it is not even a choice. Mutual recognition is not something that was recognized beforehand by our side alone — it is the essence of the Declaration of Principles.

Fifthly, the Israeli representative's attempt to teach Member States how to vote is another example of objectionable arrogance. The time may have come for Israel to understand the meaning of the international unanimity vis-à-vis its illegal policies in the occupied territories.

Finally, we hope that the present Israeli Government will desist from its current approaches and policies and cease fabricating Palestinian violations of agreements in order to justify its own flagrant and continuous transgressions of these agreements. Israel should actually begin to implement the concluded agreements, which will help the peace process to move forward and guarantee the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

United Nations A/52/PV.58*

General Assembly

Fifty-second Session

Official Records

58th plenary meeting
Monday, 1 December 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 36

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/52/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/581)

Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/52/571)

The President: I first give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): It is a genuine pleasure for me once again to address the General Assembly in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and it is also an honour for me to open the annual debate on the agenda item entitled "Question of Palestine".

I should like first of all to congratulate you once again, Sir, on your well-deserved election to the presidency of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly and to recall that you were an active member of our own Committee. Your boundless energy, your diplomatic skills and your devotion to the objectives of the United Nations are well known and greatly appreciated by all. I am convinced that you will guide our work in the most productive manner.

Not so long ago, some delegations felt that the mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People had been made redundant by the positive evolution of the peace process and that the Committee and other United Nations bodies active on this issue should be phased out, together with the Secretariat units servicing them. I think that those delegations quickly changed their minds in the light of the impasse in the peace process.

While welcoming the achievements in the negotiations since September 1993 with the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the subsequent developments, in particular the Interim Agreement of 1995, the Committee cautioned that these were but steps towards the full achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Because the situation on the ground remained fragile and littered with pitfalls, the Committee reminded the international community that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility on the question of Palestine until the question has been resolved in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy.

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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* Reissued for technical reasons.

As the organ established by the General Assembly to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee has continued to endeavour to play an essential role during the transitional period envisaged by the accords and will do so until the desired solution had been reached. In the context of the international community's efforts to find a solution, we would have been the first to rejoice at positive developments in the peace process, a process that had aroused such high hopes the world over.

But today the Committee is deeply saddened and disconcerted by the increasing difficulties and obstacles that have made the peace process fragile. By resuming its policy of constructing settlements and confiscating land; by increasingly encroaching upon occupied East Jerusalem and denying residency rights to Palestinians born and living there; by carrying out prolonged and punishing blockades of the areas under Palestinian Authority control; by postponing withdrawal from much of the West Bank; by its indifferent acceptance of harassment by armed settlers against innocent, unarmed Arab civilians; by carrying out punitive expeditions and acts of intimidation against Palestinian populations; by forbidding Palestinian families to be reunited: in all these ways, the Israeli Government has created a situation of deepening despair and tension in the occupied Palestinian territory. The behaviour of the occupying Power has thus increasingly undermined the confidence and lowered the expectations brought about in 1993 by the peace process.

The Committee has repeatedly condemned acts of violence by extremists, which have resulted in tragic loss of life among innocent civilians on both sides. Such reprehensible acts are the work of the enemies of peace. They sow fear and mistrust and prevent progress towards the reconciliation that is essential to the achievement of a lasting, peaceful political solution between the parties.

The retaliatory actions taken by the Israeli Government against the entire Palestinian population can never be justified or accepted by the international community as necessary security measures. Indeed, by strangling the economy and impeding normal movement between Gaza and the West Bank, they compound feelings of insecurity and tension and cause regrettable delays in the peace process. They can only fuel further instability, violence and insecurity.

Over the past year, as Chairman of the Committee, I have repeatedly expressed these concerns to the Security Council, as well as to the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-first session and at its tenth emergency special session. I have urged these organs, and the internati
community as a whole, to intensify their efforts
initiatives to save and reinvigorate the peace process
to ensure respect for the provisions of international
in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, in
occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

I have also actively participated on behalf o
Committee in the frequent deliberations on Palestine
by intergovernmental bodies, notably the Moveme
Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of the Isl
Conference and the Organization of African Unity.
resolutions and decisions, as well as those of
intergovernmental and United Nations bodies, testi
their keen interest and deep concern with respect t
disturbing situation in Palestine. They refle
determination to act collectively to break the dange
impasse in which the peace process is trapped.
community of peace-loving nations simply wishes thr
its messages to make the parties understand that
peace can bring security, and that only security
preserve peace.

In carrying out its mandate, the Committee has
done everything possible to make an effective
constructive contribution through the programm
seminars and meetings of non-governmental organiza
organized under its auspices. Those meetings
provided a forum for frank and useful discussion an
the adoption of action-oriented strategies with
participation of Governments, intergovernmental and
governmental organizations, experts, leaders, em
individuals and Palestinian and Israeli decision mak

We also attach particular importance to
programme of studies and publications, and
activities of the Secretariat's Division for Pales
Rights, including the training programme for staff
Palestinian Authority and the United Nations elect
information system on the question of Palestine.

When he introduces the Committee report, I an
that the Rapporteur will provide the necessary d
about these various activities.

For my part, I would like to take this opportun
express the Committee's gratitude and appreciatio
the generous support of the Governments of Ind
and of Jordan, which provided venues and faciliti
the holding of an Asian seminar and non-govern
organization symposium and for a seminar on assi
to the Palestinian people respectively.

We are also deeply grateful to the Belgian Government for offering facilities for a conference next February to be organized in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, and to the Chilean Government for having agreed to the holding of the next Latin American and Caribbean seminar and non-governmental organization symposium.

The General Assembly is aware that the Republic of South Africa has requested to become a full member of the Committee and that Namibia will soon do the same. We try to encourage greater participation by all States in the Committee's activities, and other Governments have expressed an interest. We also note with appreciation the increasingly positive votes on many resolutions relating to the question of Palestine, as seen in the overwhelming majorities in favour of the resolutions adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. This growing support sends a clear message and is a source of hope and reassurance, encouraging all the members of the Committee to intensify our efforts even further in the coming year.

I believe that the events of the past year have shown, without the shadow of a doubt, the great dangers of the policies of expansion and exclusion pursued by the present Israeli leadership. These policies run directly counter to the historical trend towards the resolution of conflicts in the world through dialogue and cooperation. Confidence-building measures and negotiation that should be at the basis of the dynamic of the peace process.

By seeking to impose an unjust peace denying the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, these policies imperil the achievements of peace and the fragile network of economic, political and social relationships that was beginning to be established in Palestine. A rare historical opportunity is being squandered, with no other viable solution being proposed.

It is time, today more than ever before, to increase initiatives in order to save the peace process and spare the peoples of the region the spectre of war and acts of violence.

We earnestly hope that this debate, like the recent debate at the tenth emergency special session, will show the way towards peace by once again reminding the Israeli leaders of their country's obligations as a State party to the Fourth Geneva Convention and as a Member State of the United Nations. We must also reaffirm the position clearly adopted by the entire international community in favour of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and of a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which remains at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In order to achieve this just and lasting settlement, rooted in international legitimacy, the two parties must make an enormous effort and understand that only peace, mutual confidence and coexistence, with respect for the rights and dignity of all, can put an end to all the bloodshed, to so much sustained hatred and pointless destruction.

The President: I now call on the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur, having assumed my new functions earlier this year, to present to the General Assembly for the first time the annual report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

During the past year the Committee continued to do its utmost to implement the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report covers the new developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I, which indicates briefly the Committee's objectives and concerns in the light of the evolving situation. Chapters II and III are procedural; they summarize the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information (DPI) and give information on the Committee's organization of work.

Chapter IV covers developments in the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee in the course of the year. While noting some progress with regard to the peace process early in the year, particularly the signing of the Protocol on Hebron and the release of some Palestinian detainees, the Committee was increasingly concerned at the ongoing deterioration of the situation and the intensification of violence and tension on the ground. The Committee expressed its great concern that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced serious setbacks due to the position of the Government of Israel on the various aspects of the peace process. In particular, the Committee was alarmed by the position of the Government of Israel on the question of Jerusalem, especially the establishment of a new settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, the growing threat to Palestinian residency rights in Jerusalem, the continued expansion of settlements in general, confiscation of Arab land, demolition of Palestinian houses and the prolonged closure of the Palestinian territory.

The main body of the report is in chapter V, which gives an account of the action taken by the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 51/23 and 51/24. The Committee Chairman participated in international efforts in opposition to the new Israeli settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim by drawing the attention of the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council thereto and by actively representing the Committee in all the relevant meetings of the Security Council, the resumed fifty-first session and the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly.

The Committee also sought to remind the international community of the fact that the occupation still continues, by organizing a special commemorative meeting on the thirtieth anniversary of the war of June 1967. The Chairman also raised the Committee's concerns in the relevant international ministerial meetings and summits at which he represented the Committee. The report also notes similar concerns expressed by various United Nations and intergovernmental bodies in their resolutions and communiqués relating to the question of Palestine, the list of which is included in the report.

Chapter V also provides information on the Committee's efforts to make its work more relevant and useful in the light of the new developments on the ground, and to involve additional countries in its work. The Committee continued to endeavour to sharpen the focus of its seminars and non-governmental organization meetings in the various regions, to make them more action-oriented, and to reach out to broader non-governmental organization constituencies. The meetings held during 1997 included the annual meeting of consultations with the representatives of non-governmental organization coordinating committees, held in New York in February; an Asian seminar and non-governmental organization symposium on the question of Palestine, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in May; the annual seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, held in Amman, Jordan, also in May; the annual North American Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, held in New York in June; and the annual European Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations and the International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations, held in Geneva in August. I would like to take this opportunity to join our Chairman in expressing our profound thanks to the Governments of Indonesia and Jordan for providing the venue and facilitating the holding of these important events.

The chapter also provides information on the activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights in the field of research and publications, including the recent issuance of a study on the status of Jerusalem, as well as on the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL). It also provides information on a training programme on the workings of the United Nations for staff of the Palestinian Authority, initiated in 1996, which is being continued this year. Finally, the chapter describes the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which took place in New York as well as at the United Nations Offices in Geneva, Vienna and other cities.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/25, including the publications and audio-visual activities of the Department, and other activities carried out by the Department. The seventh and last chapter contains the recommendations of the Committee to the General Assembly. Noting the various anniversaries of the history of dispossession of the Palestinian people commemorated in 1997, the Committee urges the international community to redouble its efforts in support of their inalienable rights, which are the key to a just and lasting peace. The Committee also considers it essential for the international community to intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and for the effective implementation of the agreements reached since 1993.

At the same time, the Committee expresses its greatest concern at the growing stalemate in the peace process and the exacerbation of tension and violence on the ground. It calls for an end to the prolonged closure of the occupied territory and other forms of collective punishment, in the interest of restoring mutual confidence and promoting peace.

The Committee expresses special concern regarding actions taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and the intensification of settlement construction, as they jeopardize prospects for a just peace and for the achievement of the Palestinian right to self-determination. With regard particularly to Israel's decision to build a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in spite of international opposition, the Committee expresses its full support for the recommendations made by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session, and for the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Committee also states that it will remain engaged in the follow-up to these recommendations in order to promote the necessary action.

The Committee also calls for additional efforts by the international community to restore momentum to the Middle East peace process and reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached, based on established and accepted principles. The Committee reiterates its view that its own role will continue to be useful and necessary until a satisfactory final settlement is reached and invites the General Assembly once again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

Finally, the Committee expresses its great appreciation to those States which have supported its work; it stresses the continued importance and usefulness of its programme of seminars and non-governmental organization meetings; and it calls for the greatest possible participation of States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the meetings organized under its auspices, as such meetings provide useful and unique forums for discussion of all relevant issues and for the development of joint activities by all those concerned.

The Committee also emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat as a focal point for collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine and requests it to continue its programme of publications and studies and to develop further the United Nations computer-based information system on the question of Palestine. It also requests the continuation of the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, the Committee expresses its intention to continue to strive to achieve maximum effectiveness in the implementation of its mandate and to adjust its work programme in the light of developments, in order to continue to contribute, to the extent possible, to the realization of the common United Nations objective of achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

I trust that this report will be of assistance to the General Assembly in facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

The President: The next speaker is the Head of the Observer delegation of Palestine, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I give him the floor.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to speak today, and to begin my statement by greeting and congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly in these turbulent international circumstances. We trust in your wisdom to ensure the success of this session. We would also like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail, who presided over the previous session with success. I should also like to express our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, who continues to work tirelessly on the question of Palestine.

We are returning here to the General Assembly to examine the question of Palestine after the shock that international public opinion underwent as a result of the impasse in the peace process, especially when Mr. Netanyahu became Prime Minister of Israel last year following the success of the Likud coalition in the recent elections. In those elections, the extremist right in Israel was victorious. Everyone knows that the extremist and fundamentalist parties have bolstered their position. They won more parliamentary seats, resulting in an imbalance in the composition of the Israeli Knesset. This is a proof that the current of extremism inside Israeli society is continuing to enjoy a majority, which ensures its overwhelming success.

In the wake of the assassination of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, it was expected that the parties and groups that advocate peace would be successful. But the situation has been reversed, with the fall of the Labour party and the triumph of *Likud* and its extremist allies.

Moreover, Israeli extremism has been manifested in the creation of pretexts and facts on the ground which concretely reaffirm the Israeli Government's rejection of the concluded agreements and its reneging on previous obligations. It has therefore called for re-examination of the agreement concerning redeployment from Hebron which was signed by the previous Labour Government. That redeployment was supposed to have been completed before the Israeli elections in order for redeployment to be resumed from the rural areas, labelled B, and the departure of the Israeli army from over 600 Palestinian villages. But Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, insisted on discussing the departure from Hebron thus wasting seven months and, in the end, winning 20 per cent of the territory of the city following its partition, keeping for Israel the historical, commercial and industrial parts of the city, even though the town of Hebron is 100 per cent Palestinian.

Regrettably, instead of the United States playing a positive role to prevent a recurrence of the cycle of violence and to reduce the tension, Mr. Christopher, the former United States Secretary of State, sent a letter to Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, in which he acknowledged the right of freedom to redeploy the Israeli army, to set a date for that redeployment and its geographical extent and to determine the degree to which more powers would be transferred to the Palestinian National Authority. All of that was without negotiations with the Palestinians, thus contravening the provisions of the accord that called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces and their redeployment from 30 per cent of the territory of the Palestinian West Bank immediately following the implementation of the Hebron Protocol.

Despite the agreement reached between the Palestinian and Israeli sides on an accord on the city, the Government of Israel immediately started the construction of settlements in Jebel Abu Ghneim in the occupied area of Jerusalem/Bethlehem while it was supposed to start withdrawing its forces from the rural areas instead of starting to confiscate Palestinian lands and building settlements on them.

With regard to Jerusalem, Israel continues its violations. It confiscates Palestinian homes and other buildings, especially inside the walled Holy City of Jerusalem. Israel has developed a blueprint, in a very short period of time, to confiscate 18 Palestinian homes in order to house 18 Jewish families, thus challenging the international community, the spiritual dimension of all faiths and the principles of coexistence among all these faiths. This is in addition to its refusal to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 465 (1980), 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 1073 (1996).

Since the signing of the Hebron Protocol and up to the present, negotiations and direct and indirect contacts, at times through concerned intermediaries, have been conducted. In addition, the United States, as a sponsor of the peace talks, is undertaking timid efforts to convince the Israeli Government to fulfil its obligations, to no avail.

When Ms. Albright became Secretary of State she made little effort in that direction. As she put it, she was waiting for the two parties, the Palestinian and the Israeli sides, to reach an understanding, in order for her to visit the region to give the peace march a push and put it back on track.

When the state of tension heightened in the region with a new cycle of violence, Ms. Albright came to the region and convened meetings with all the parties concerned in the peace process, whether Arab or Israeli.

She herself witnessed first hand human and material manifestations which condemn Israeli conduct and prove the necessity of intensifying efforts to prevent the deterioration of the situation in the region. Ms. Albright herself witnessed the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation and under the strict Israeli blockade.

When she returned to Washington, she addressed an invitation to the Palestinians and to the Israelis to meet at a negotiating session in New York in the last third of September 1997. After the meeting she outlined four points at a press conference. She emphasized the security questions and the need to combat terrorism and its infrastructure. But she failed to make a clear reference to the need to put an end to settlement activity and the construction of settlements. At the same time, she referred to the redeployment of the Israeli army, but linked that withdrawal to conditions that would, in point of fact, lead to the non-fulfilment of such a withdrawal.

However, Ms. Albright knows full well that these two points are the underlying causes of the current tension and the resurgence of the cycle of violence in the region.

As is known, the Israeli Government has committed provocative acts, such as the opening of the tunnel adjacent to the holy Moslem shrine, the Haram al-Sharif, in Jerusalem which resulted in violent clashes in September of last year leaving 83 Palestinian martyrs and more than 1,300 other casualties.

At that time, the Security Council adopted resolution 1073 (1996), in which it condemned these provocative acts. At that meeting of the Security Council, which took place during the session of the General Assembly, the Foreign Ministers of the permanent members of the Security Council, along with other Ministers of the Member States of the United Nations took part in the Security Council's discussions.

America's position remains hesitant. It is not playing its role effectively as a sponsor of the peace process. The parties concerned have accepted the initiative put forward by a former American President, Mr. George Bush, in 1991, and the Madrid Peace Conference was convened on the basis of the land-for-peace formula and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied Arab and Palestinian territories that were occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which relates to withdrawal from Southern Lebanon.

But, as usual, the Israeli Government turned its back completely on the resolutions of the Security Council and on all the other accords and obligations. The United States was supposed to play a vital and active role in reviving the peace process and bringing pressure to bear on Israel, utilizing its special means. That gave Israel valuable time in which to confiscate more Palestinian land, build more Israeli settlements, tighten its blockade against the Palestinian people, economically and militarily, and paralyse the movement of the Palestinian citizens.

The Israeli blockade prevents Palestinian citizens from moving, hampers the transfer of goods and the movement of the populace within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and between them, prevents entry and departure to and from the Palestinian territories, erects checkpoints, and isolates towns and villages, preventing the population from moving between them. Such measures have led to a severe shortage of primary materials and foodstuffs, resulting in economic paralysis. They have also raised the rate of unemployment to about 65 per cent and had a serious adverse impact on national and foreign investments, which have declined substantially.

Moreover, the Israeli Government has withheld tax revenues which it collected from Palestinian citizens, and which are due to the Palestinian National Authority. This was substantiated by the report of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, of 26 June 1997 (A/ES-10/6).

At the same time, Israel has backtracked from the agreement that was reached on the return of displaced Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip who were expelled as a result of the aggression committed in 1967. The total number of these displaced persons is no less than 750,000. That commitment should have been implemented, in pursuance of Security Council resolution 237 (1967), as well as under the 1993 Declaration of Principles. Israel also continues to deny to those refugees who were ejected from Palestine in 1948 their right to return to their homes under General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

Here it should be kept in mind that Israel was born in the United Nations under General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947 and did not emerge through history. That partition resolution was a birth certificate not only for Israel but also for an independent Arab State of Palestine. In this context, it is very bizarre that today we hear the current Israeli Prime Minister threatening to annex Palestinian territory if the Palestine Organization were to declare an independent State of Palestine.

Four years have elapsed, and Israel continues to prevaricate and is engaged in an exercise of subterfuge and circumvention in its interpretation of the provisions of the accords and agreements that were reached. It continues to Judaize more and more Palestinian territory through the confiscation of Palestinian land, the building of more and more settlements and the tightening of the siege imposed upon the Palestinian Authority, in order to cripple its effectiveness and obstruct the path of the Palestinian people with a view to denying them their right to exercise sovereignty over their national territory and resources.

Israel denies the Palestinian people their national rights, and is engaged in intensive efforts to perpetuate the settler presence on Palestinian territories and increase the number of settlements and settlers constantly. The objective is to make the Israeli settlements not only difficult, but impossible, to dismantle in accordance with Security Council resolution 465 (1980), which, by a unanimous vote, called for their dismantlement. Successive Security Council resolutions have emphasized that Israeli policies and practices of building settlements are illegal and are serious impediments to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace. Furthermore, they contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 as well as international law. The Security Council went even further than that. Resolution 465 (1980), unanimously adopted by the Security Council in March 1980, called on Israel to dismantle the Israeli settlements that were in existence at that time.

Since then we have noted a regression in the position of the United States of America. The United States took no action beyond pro forma protests regarding Israel's settlement activity. Indeed, on certain occasions, the United States allowed Israel to complete construction activities in some settlements, even though perceiving in those settlements an obstacle to peaceful settlement and a factor that complicates the peace process.

We have noticed recently that the United States, regrettably, has started to look at the issue from an Israeli perspective. It has stated that the United Nations no longer has a role to play in the questions pertaining to a peaceful, political settlement such as of Israeli settlements, Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees and Palestinian sovereignty.

Most recently, the United States exercised its veto twice in one week in the Security Council, in order to prevent the Council from undertaking its responsibilities. That action by the United States led to the convening of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, the first in 15 years. I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those Member States which supported the convening of that special session and voted in favour of the important resolutions it adopted. We continue to hope that those resolutions will be implemented.

By backtracking on the accords that have been reached, Israel deliberately seeks to tighten its control and hegemony over Palestinian land and resources in order to continue its settlement activity without hindrance. Israel has built bypass roads linking the Israeli settlements, of which there are now 183 in the West Bank. These bypass roads do not run through Palestinian villages, but around them. Indeed, they are a siege against those Palestinian villages and towns. Israel uses those bypass roads for its military and security purposes, thereby managing to isolate the Palestinian villages and towns and cut them off from each other, creating for them severe economic, social and security problems.

This is an accurate account of developments in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track. As to the other tracks, namely the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese, these are still frozen. But more serious than that, the Israeli Government is now scheming against those two sister countries. The Israeli army is committing repeated acts of aggression against sister Lebanon, creating scores of civilian casualties and destroying the country's vital centres. Yet Israel claims that it is prepared to withdraw first from southern Lebanon and then expresses its wish for peace while continuing to commit acts of aggression against Lebanon.

Facts and events show that the peace process in the Middle East is at an impasse owing to the behaviour of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his political group and the provocative measures taken by that country. As a sponsor of the peace process, the United States should have played its role in reviving the peace process. The situation today requires a reaffirmation by the United Nations of its permanent responsibilities with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security and in ensuring the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council calling for Israel to withdraw from all territories occupied since 1967 so that the cycle of violence and tension will not recur, particularly given the disappearance of confidence between the parties to the conflict.

The United Nations has previously taken practical measures to address numerous international problems. Is it not now time for the Organization to take concrete steps to preserve the peace, to halt the deterioration of the security situation in the region, and to preserve and revitalize the peace process on the basis of the principles set forth at the Madrid Conference? Israel's persistence in its approach makes it impossible to achieve success in political negotiations or to reach a solution which would keep peace and security in the region. The perpetuation of Israeli occupation and its continuation of settlement activities inevitably doom the peace process, which demands first and foremost Israel's withdrawal from all Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. Israel must also dismantle the Israeli settlements. Unless those things are accomplished, the entire region of the Middle East will continue to be vulnerable to explosions and successive wars.

There is no doubt that the decision by the Arab States to suspend the normalization of relations with Israel and to stay away from meetings of the various multilateral commissions, as well as the absence of most of the Arab States from the recent economic forum in Doha, Qatar, are definite evidence of the loss of confidence in the success of the peace process.

The requirements of peace and security call for all Member States to respect Security Council resolutions and to commit to their implementation so that the United Nations may remain an effective mechanism for addressing regional problems by peaceful means. However, we see that some Powers are acting according to a double standard and that they exempt Israel from compliance with United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions, even though that country is the party that threatens peace and security in the region thanks to its possession of weapons of mass destruction and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons while continuing to impede the peace process, freezing it.

The continued sanctions against Iraq, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Sudan have begun to raise questions in world public opinion about the duration of such sanctions. Is it not time that such unjust sanctions be lifted and that conditions be created that could bring relief to the Iraqi population, so that Iraqi children might have the basic life requirements of foodstuffs and medical supplies and the country have a chance to return to international life as an effective member of the world community?

We look forward to the full implementation of United Nations resolutions, especially those adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, including those regarding the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 in order to examine the necessary coercive measures to be adopted to ensure respect for that Convention and the implementation of its provisions in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 by Israel, including Jerusalem.

We also hope that at this session the General Assembly will endorse the full participation of Palestine in the proceedings of the United Nations and ensure that participation by Israel in those proceedings is in line with the provisions of international law and those of the Fourth Geneva Convention with regard to the Arab territories occupied since 1967, especially with regard to Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan.

We stand for comprehensive and lasting peace based on the principles of the Madrid Conference and in keeping with the provisions of United Nations Charter and its resolutions. However, we reject surrender to faits accomplis or the recognition of illegal de facto conditions created on the ground by Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories. We shall resist that injustice and aggression on the basis of our right to existence and to self-determination as a nation that has lived on that land for thousands of years and established there its glorious civilization.

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the associated country Cyprus, as well as Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East Peace Process has reached a worrying impasse. The conclusion in January 1997 of the protocol concerning the redeployment in Hebron kindled hopes of a renewal of trust between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government and hopes that this renewed trust would create a climate conducive to further fruitful negotiations. The construction of a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim/Har Homa unfortunately put an end to this encouraging perspective.

Terrorist acts, for which there can be no justification, have further compromised the trust between the parties and aggravated the crisis in the peace talks.

The European Union calls on the parties to resume political dialogue, to continue the negotiations in order to make progress on the implementation of the Interim Agreement and the Hebron protocol, and to resume the final status talks. It is therefore vital to refrain from any unilateral action that would prejudge questions relating to the final status and to restore on a lasting basis full and complete cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

The European Union strongly reaffirms that peace in the Middle East is a question of fundamental importance to it. It will continue its efforts to support the peace process through the relations of friendship and trust that it enjoys with the various parties by intensifying its commitment at the diplomatic level, including through its special envoy for the Middle East peace process, Ambassador Moratinos, as well as its economic commitment in the region.

Thus, the President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, Mr. Jacques F. Poos, visited the region from 11 to 14 November 1997. On this occasion, he reaffirmed to his Middle East partners the Union's commitment to working to assist the current peace efforts.

In this context, the President of the Council argued in favour of implementing confidence-building measures, such as the opening of the Gaza airport, the construction of a port and free passage for Palestinians between Gaza and the West Bank. He also insisted on the need to finalize a code of good conduct between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. He also repeated the European Union's view that, important as such confidence-building measures may be, they should not obscure the real priorities of the peace process, namely the implementation of the agreed peace accords concerning the withdrawal of Israeli troops, as well as the fight against terrorism and the opening of the final status talks.

In addition to these political efforts, the European Union has undertaken to provide substantial funding to promote the economic and social development of the Palestinian population. Thus, the Union remains the major donor of funds to the Palestinians. We have pledged ECU 500 million in aid for the period from 1994 to 1999. In 1997, a package of ECU 50 million was specifically allocated to education and the media and to technical assistance to the municipalities and the Palestinian Legislative Council. Finally, ECU 4 million have been made available to the Palestinian Authority in order to meet its immediate needs on account of Israel's withholding of fiscal revenues due.

There is no alternative to the peace process launched in Madrid and Oslo. The European Union calls on the peoples and Governments of the region to regain the spirit of mutual trust that kindled the hope of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, which would make it possible to resolve the question of Palestine and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): At the outset let me announce that Bangladesh has become one of the sponsors of three draft resolutions, A/52/L.49, L.50 and L.51, that are now being circulated on this question.

Bangladesh is deeply appreciative of the substantive report on the question of Palestine submitted by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in document A/52/35. We commend the good work being done by this 23-member Committee as the organ of the General Assembly dealing with the question of Palestine. Bangladesh has had the honour of attending its sessions as an observer on a regular basis. We also pay tribute to Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal for his leadership as the Chairman of the Committee. The report reminds the international community how much work still needs to be done — notwithstanding so many resolutions, United Nations sessions and international conferences — to bring about a just resolution of the Palestine question and, thus, achieve a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The year 1997 marks three decades that Israel has occupied the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and other Arab territories. It is also the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the intifadah, the Palestinian uprising that helped create the conditions for the peace process. Bangladesh therefore underscores the need to redouble this year our efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East by establishing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Like the Palestinian Rights Committee, we are extremely concerned and anguished that the hopes ushered in by initial positive developments in the region are not being realized, leaving the peace process increasingly in jeopardy and, at the same time, causing an alarming exacerbation of tension and violence on the ground.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is a matter of grave concern to the international community. It is indeed unfortunate that the Israeli authorities have — in defiance of all United Nations resolutions and in flagrant violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people — continued to pursue repressive policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. The United Nations has stressed the need to preserve the territorial integrity of all the occupied Palestinian territory and to guarantee the freedom of movement of persons and goods in the territory, including the removal of restrictions on movement into and from East Jerusalem, and the freedom of movement to and from the outside world. The United Nations has also demanded immediate and full cessation of construction in Jebel Abu Ghneim and of all other Israeli settlement activities, as well as of all illegal measures and actions in Jerusalem.

Regrettably, Israel has not heeded this demand and has, in fact, continued with such illegal measures and actions, including violating the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory and imposing restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons and goods. Bangladesh believes that the harsh economic measures imposed against the occupied Palestinian territory, including the prolonged blockade, are a form of collective punishment, in contravention of international law and the agreements reached.

Bangladesh, which is committed by its Constitution to supporting oppressed peoples throughout the world, has consistently expressed strong solidarity with our Palestinian brethren, always and everywhere, in particular at the United Nations and in all major international forums. We reiterate our strong condemnation of Israel's policy of systematic violation of international humanitarian law, as well as fundamental freedoms and basic human rights, in the occupied territories. In her message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People this year on 29 November, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that:

> "We reiterate our appeal for ensuring the applicability of the relevant Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories so that the dignity of the Palestinian people is no more assailed, so that no Palestinian is subjected to humiliation or degrading treatment, so that they receive the protection provided by international law."

My delegation would like to stress the necessity for commitment to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, and the need for immediate and scrupulous implementation of the agreement reached between the parties, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from the West Bank and the commencement of negotiations on the final settlement. Bangladesh joins others in calling for a reinjection of momentum into the stalled Middle East peace process. We call upon the concerned parties, the sponsors of the peace process and other international parties, as well as the entire international community, to undertake all the necessary efforts and initiatives to bring the peace process back on track and to ensure its continuity and success.

Bangladesh believes that, in the interest of restoring mutual confidence and promoting peace, it is absolutely necessary to end all illegal measures and actions by Israel. It cannot be overemphasized that the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict will constitute a significant contribution to strengthening international peace, security and progress. We urge all concerned to ensure that the peace accords are complied with fully and negotiations with the Palestinian Authority pursued in a congenial atmosphere. The peace process can be effectively advanced by the withdrawal of all troops from the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, stopping settlement in those areas with immediate effect, and allowing the Palestinian diaspora to return with full dignity to its homeland. It is also essential that the international community be forthcoming in fulfilling its commitment to supporting the peace process by extending economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people during the interim period.

My delegation strongly supports the call voiced by delegations for conferring upon Palestine the same rights and privileges of participation, except voting rights and candidatures, as those conferred upon States Members of the United Nations in the sessions and work of the General Assembly and in the international conferences convened under the auspices of the Assembly or other organs of the United Nations. We also strongly support the Palestinian rights Committee's view that the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat continues to make a useful and constructive contribution to the dissemination of information on all issues pertaining to the question of Palestine. We request the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources to enable it to perform its task and to cover adequately the various aspects of the question of Palestine, including the project for the training of staff of the Palestinian Authority.

In conclusion, Bangladesh reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The General Assembly is considering the question of Palestine at a critical moment in the history of the Middle East region, for the peace process which began in 1991, generating great hopes and expectations that a durable and lasting peace was within reach — especially one that included the exercise by the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination and independence — has been jeopardized. The region now stands dangerously close to becoming embroiled in tension and turmoil. The continuing ordeal of the Palestinians, as well as the deteriorating situation on the ground, are well chronicled in the report to the Assembly of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Allow me at this juncture to commend Ambassador Ibra Ka, whose dedicated service and dynamic stewardship of the Committee — of which Indonesia takes pride in having been a member since its inception — has helped to mobilize global opinion at this critical stage of the peace process to the just cause of the Palestinian people.

The past year has been marked by increasing tension, which has been exacerbated by a stalemate in the peace process. The tragedies of the past risk being reenacted and the spirit of peace and harmony appears to be fading into the distance. We had earnestly hoped, along with the rest of the international community, that the peace accords that were so scrupulously and painstakingly negotiated would be implemented in good faith. Instead, we are confronted with a retreat from those very fundamental principles of the peace process, a defiant refusal by the Government of Israel to honour its legal obligations and commitments, and an audacious attempt unilaterally to abrogate the peace accords. These actions are contrary to all acceptable norms of international relations and an affront to the principles of justice.

Meanwhile, it is appalling that the Israeli authorities have embarked on perpetuating policies which can only have untold and disastrous consequences. Foremost of these is the expansion of settlements in and around Jebel Abu Ghneim, compounded by other untenable actions, such as the demolition of properties, closures, and the denial of residency rights to Palestinians in Jerusalem by the confiscation of documents. These acts have not only dealt a serious blow to the peace process, but have inflamed passions in the occupied territories and throughout the world.

It was in this overriding context that the international community, through the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which has been convened three times over the past year, expressed its unequivocal condemnation of Israel's settlement activities in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of occupied East Jerusalem, as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, international law and other relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Clearly, the Government of Israel cannot hide under the flimsy pretext of security considerations to justify its untenable actions against an entire people, nor can it rationalize its acts of intimidation and practices of repression and persecution. Such ill-conceived policies do not bode well for a stable peace in the region and entail even greater ramifications for the world at large. It would mark a return to aggression and be an assault on peace, for peace and security are intertwined and cannot exist on the basis of the usurpation of the basic rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the Government of Israel must be urged to implement its legal commitments with consistency and fairness. Only in this way can a climate of mutual trust and confidence be fostered, enabling the parties to resume negotiations on the remaining issues and thereby paving the way to genuine peace.

It is self-evident that a difficult road lies ahead in surmounting the decades of occupation and injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people, which have gravely undermined the socio-economic fabric of their society. In this regard, we believe that the United Nations and its agencies have a central role to play in alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people, and also in assisting in carrying out the formidable and challenging tasks of nation-building. We are therefore gratified by the appointment of Ambassador Chinmaya R. Gharekhan as the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, to serve as the focal point of the efforts of the Organization, as well as to maintain contact with the donor community and other non-governmental organizations in this field.

It was five decades ago that the General Assembly was seized of the question of Palestine with the adoption of resolution 181 (II). Throughout these long and arduous years, more time and effort has been expended on the question of Palestine than on any other international problem. Yet this question remains on our agenda. Without a shadow of a doubt, a durable and just solution to this intractable problem can be attained only if the Palestinian people are allowed to regain their legitimate national rights — including the right to return to their own independent homeland — based on the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

For its part, Indonesia will continue to give unswerving support to the valiant Palestinian people. It has consistently maintained the Palestinian national cause as a matter consonant with the fundamental principles and purposes enshrined in its own Constitution. It was therefore most gratifying for Indonesia to host the Asian seminar and non-governmental organization symposium on achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, held in Jakarta from 4 to 7 May 1997, which provided an appropriate forum to explore all avenues which would lead to a comprehensive and just settlement to the question of Palestine.

Standing at the threshold of the next century, we fervently hope that peace will be permanently anchored in the Middle East and that a displaced people who have known nothing but frustration and bitterness, deprivation and denial, will finally emerge triumphant.

Mr. Diatta (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): First of all, I would like to express, on behalf of my delegation, my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the clear and comprehensive report on the question of Palestine which each has submitted.

In the light of events during the past year, we can affirm that progress on this question has not met the expectations of the international community. In fact, the peace process on which it had placed so much hope has been at an impasse for several months now.

The serious setback sustained by the peace process is undoubtedly the result of the unilateral decision of the Israeli Government to build a new settlement in occupied East Jerusalem, in flagrant violation of agreements concluded. This unfortunate decision has plunged the entire region of the Middle East — and in particular the occupied Palestinian territory — into an alarming political situation characterized in particular by an escalation of violence on the ground and, above all, by numerous losses of human lives, both Palestinian and Israeli.

The prevailing situation of confrontation is all the more regrettable since the bilateral negotiations which were begun in order to implement the agreements were at a critical phase regarding the final status of the Palestinian territories.

Such an atmosphere, along with the fact that the Security Council has twice been prevented from taking the necessary measures to deal with this issue, led the international community — represented by the General Assembly — to hold an emergency special session, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter. However, despite the adoption by an overwhelming majority of Member States, of resolutions ES-10/2 and ES-10/3, which, among other things, demanded that Israel renounce all illegal measures and activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, the political situation and security have continued to deteriorate as a result of the Israeli Government's non-compliance with the provisions of those resolutions and the Oslo agreements.

This is why public opinion throughout the world has been perturbed by the Israeli policy and practices in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, policy and practices which threaten to plunge the Middle East region into a new period of conflict unless we take care to prevent it. Even in Israel, more and more voices are raised to demand the relaunching of the peace process and to express their disappointment, even frustration, concerning the illegal measures taken by Israel.

The popular rally organized in Tel Aviv last 8 November, at the very site of the assassination of one of the great architects of the peace process, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, is the most striking illustration of this. Moreover, this general mobilization for peace was unanimously acknowledged to have been the greatest gathering in the history of Israel.

My delegation therefore shares the point of view expressed by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People when it affirms in its report that it is

> "essential for the international community to intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and for the effective implementation of the agreements reached and for the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis." (A/52/35, para. 125)

Our General Assembly must shoulder this task, as it has been given a permanent responsibility regarding the question of Palestine until it is settled in all its aspects.

My delegation calls on the parties concerned to re-establish an ongoing dialogue and resume their cooperation to change the current alarming situation and make progress in the effective implementation of the agreements reached, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace.

Indeed, as we know, peace is an endeavour based on mutual trust and requiring behaviour which will lead to an atmosphere of calm. Therefore, my delegation particularly urges the Israeli Government to once and for all renounce all the illegal measures it has taken, since these are endangering the Middle East peace process. Only in this way can a new opportunity be given to the peace that the international community so ardently hopes to see.

Before concluding my statement, I should like to reiterate to the Assembly the conviction of the people and Government of Niger that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East hinges on the necessary exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to establish an independent State, and on scrupulous respect of the relevant United Nations resolutions as well as of the obligations enshrined in agreements already concluded.

Niger will spare no effort to ensure the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform members that in connection with the item under consideration, five draft resolutions, contained in documents A/52/L.49 through A/52/L.53, have just been distributed to delegations in the Hall.

Mr. Qin Huasun (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): In the six years that have elapsed since the Madrid Conference, the Middle East peace process has made important headway thanks to the joint efforts of Palestine and Israel and the extensive support of the international community. Earlier this year, Palestine and Israel reached an agreement on the question of Hebron, which advanced the self-rule process of the Palestinian people another step forward. However, the insistence of the Israeli side on building Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem has led to serious difficulties in the Middle East peace process, to the suspension of Palestine-Israel peace talks and to the escalation of terrorist violence. The international community is deeply concerned and disturbed by this situation.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. The suffering of the Palestinian people over the past 50 years has elicited broad concern and sympathy from the international community. Only a comprehensive, just and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine and the restoration to the Palestinian people of all their legitimate national rights, including the right to establish an independent State, can bring about genuine and lasting peace in the region.

The history of the Middle East over the past decades, and particularly the developments in the Middle East peace process in recent years, have proved that the countries in the region can enjoy real security and promote regional economic cooperation and common development only when there is a comprehensive and just peace. To this end, we call on Israel to stop building Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, and we hope that all parties concerned will continue to take a flexible and pragmatic approach, strictly observe and implement the agreements already reached, fulfil in real earnest their obligations, remove obstructions and resume talks at an early date on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, so as to push the peace process forward.

For historical reasons and as a result of the continued closure and sanctions, people's lives and the economy in the areas of Palestinian self-rule have faced many difficulties since the start of that self-rule; this has seriously hindered development. The Israeli side should refrain from enforcing closure in the self-rule areas and from freezing Palestinian assets at will. The international community should also provide greater support and assistance for the Palestinian people. In this connection, developed countries should undertake additional obligations and honour at an early date the commitments already entered into so as to facilitate an early economic recovery and development in the areas of Palestinian self-rule.

In recent years, the United Nations has played an increasingly important role in resolving regional conflicts and in the maintenance of international peace, and it has made contributions to the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the question of the Middle East as a whole. Since the beginning of this year, the General Assembly has convened its tenth emergency special session and two resumed sessions on the question of Palestine and adopted relevant resolutions; for this we wish to express our appreciation. We hope and believe that the United Nations will play an even greater positive role in advancing the Middle East peace process and ultimately bringing about a comprehensive, fair and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine and the Middle East question.

The Chinese Government and people are very much concerned about the developments in the Middle East region. We have consistently supported the just cause of the Palestinian people and contributed to promoting the Middle East peace process. We are of the view that peace and stability in the Middle East region accord with the fundamental interests of the peoples in the region and contribute to peace and development in the world as a whole. We will, as always, work untiringly with the international community for peace and stability in the region. China has already provided, and will continue to provide, assistance, to extent of its ability, to the Palestinian people through various channels and contribute its share to the economic development of the areas of Palestinian self-rule.

Mr. Gold (Israel): In the last four years, the people of Israel have witnessed two contrasting realities in their pursuit of peace with the Palestinians. True, there were a stunning series of diplomatic breakthroughs between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), followed by a peace treaty with Jordan and a web of new relationships with a half-dozen Arab States. Israelis were filled with hope that at long last their state of siege had ended and that they could look forward to an era of normalcy and safety.

But the people of Israel witnessed another reality as well. From the 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO until the May 1996 election of the current Israeli Government, nearly 250 Israelis died in an unprecedented wave of Palestinian terrorism aimed at the heart of Israel's cities and in their vicinity: in Afula, Hadera, Beit-Lid, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Indeed, more Israelis died in these three years from such attacks than in the previous decade. During 1997, while the frequency of these attacks was reduced, the bombings continued nonetheless in the Mahane Yehuda market and the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall in Jerusalem.

Israel had known terrorism before, but these cases reflected a completely different situation. These were not occasional knifings or individual drive-by shootings, but highly lethal suicide bombings backed by a vast and expanding organizational infrastructure. It recruited and trained personnel, manufactured and stockpiled weapons materials, and commanded and financed elaborate operations. Military-grade explosives, which had not been used in such attacks in more than 10 years, were suddenly available in large quantities, with devastating results. But whether belonging to the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam units of the Hamas or to the Islamic Jihad, this organizational infrastructure was growing in the very same territories that had been given over to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority of Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Today there is a common misconception that the peace process was in an idyllic state until last year and has only just lately deteriorated. This is completely false. It is as false on the Palestinian negotiating track as it is on the Syrian track, where Israel went through two mini-wars in Lebanon and absorbed more than 200 Katyusha rocket strikes from Syrian-controlled territory in Lebanon. The fact is that the present Israeli Government inherited a peace process that was in a shambles because the core bargain of the Oslo agreements had been repeatedly violated: that Israel would address Palestinian aspirations by creating areas of Palestinian self-government and that the Palestinian Authority would assume responsibility for security in those very same areas. This bargain has not been kept. As a result, innocent Israelis have paid for this with their lives in brutal suicide bombing after suicide bombing in the heart of our cities.

The Government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had many options by which to contend with this mounting terror. Israel could have let despair and cynicism overtake diplomacy and could have declared that the peace process had failed. The Israeli Government rejected this option. The Government could have ignored the truth behind these assaults in our cities and blamed only distant adversaries, such as Iran. This would have failed to address the fact that the wave of terror attacks in Israel was emanating from areas under the military control of our negotiating partners. Only by insisting on their accountability could we save the lives of our people. Therefore we chose the option of making an impaired peace process work by adding principles of peacemaking that previously had been lacking.

This September, Israel's Foreign Minister, David Levy, stood before the General Assembly and suggested a code of conduct for strengthening negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The first principle of the code of conduct would state that violence is totally incompatible with peace and reconciliation. Removing violence from the negotiations means that the Palestinian fight against terrorism would be made constant, and not contingent upon the extent of Israeli concessions, as explicitly demanded by Colonel Jabril Rajub of the Palestinian Authority. Removing violence from negotiations means that Palestinian security services would quell street rioting in Bethlehem and Hebron instead of inciting it. Removing violence means that Chairman Arafat would give no green lights to Hamas to attack Israel, as occurred on 9 March 1997. Removing violence means that the masterminds of the 1996 Dizingoff Centre bombing in Tel Aviv would be prosecuted and imprisoned rather than be set free to organize new cells for attacking Israel, as is occurring today.

To make negotiations work, the code of conduct suggested moreover that the continuity of contacts between Israelis and Palestinians should be protected, and not be disrupted for short-term gain. Normalization between Israel and the wider region, it was suggested, should not be halted, but should be increased. And our differences should be resolved in bilateral negotiations, not in international forums.

Beyond the code of conduct, Israel has insisted that the Oslo process be based on the principle of reciprocity. On 15 January 1997, at the signing of the Hebron Protocol, both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Chairman Yasser Arafat specifically committed themselves to implement their mutual obligations on the basis of reciprocity in the Note for the Record that was signed by the United States peace coordinator, Ambassador Dennis Ross. To this day, while parts of the international community want to place ever-mounting pressure on Israel to move on with the peace process, not a single Palestinian commitment that appears in that document has been implemented: the revision of the Palestinian Covenant calling for Israel's destruction remains incomplete; illegal firearms have not been collected; the language of incitement continues; not a single terrorist has been extradited; and, most important, the organizational infrastructure of terrorism remains intact within the areas of the Palestinian Authority. And this is only a partial list.

What is Israel supposed to do under such circumstances? Must Israel continue to pull back without getting anything in return? Israel redeployed in Hebron; it freed prisoners; it offered last March a first stage of further redeployment that would have tripled the "A" area of full Palestinian control from 2.8 per cent of the West Bank, which had been turned over by Israel's previous Government, to 10.1 per cent of the West Bank. These are all tangible acts and not just atmospherics or words. Israel is now proposing a second further redeployment; it is only seeking that the infrastructure of terrorism be finally dismantled and that it not just spill over automatically into any new areas that are handed over to Palestinian control. Israel has reengaged in negotiations on the airport, seaport and safe passage; Israel lifted closure, more than doubling the number of Palestinian workers earning their living from the Israeli economy. Israel has complied with its commitments under the Interim Agreement; the Palestinian Authority has not. Where is the reciprocity that was specifically adopted in the Note for the Record and in the United States and European side letters to Israeli and Palestinian leaders?

What stands behind the misconception nonetheless that Israel has not complied? Palestinian spokesmen point to settlement activity, knowing full well that settlement growth is no more a violation of the Oslo agreements than the natural growth of Palestinian towns and villages. Palestinian spokesmen point to our building in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Israel, knowing that Oslo left Jerusalem under Israeli jurisdiction. Palestinian spokesmen point to our offer of further redeployment as inadequate, yet they know full well that according to Oslo further redeployment is unilaterally decided and executed by Israel. Indeed, in January 1997, in the Note for the Record, Palestinian negotiators such as Mahmoud Abbas — Abu Mazen — and Saeb Erekat termed further redeployment as an issue for implementation by Israel and not as an issue for negotiation between the parties.

Chairman Arafat signed the Oslo II Interim Agreement in Washington on 28 September 1995 knowing full well that his negotiators had failed in their attempts to achieve a one-sided construction freeze on Israel building. Indeed, our late Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, confirmed this fact when he stated one week later, as Oslo II was ratified in the Knesset, that

> "We made a commitment to the Knesset not to uproot any settlement in the framework of the Interim Agreement or to freeze construction and natural growth".

Chairman Arafat signed the Interim Agreement knowing that it left it up to Israel alone to decide the size of a credible further redeployment. What is happening today is that Israel is being asked to make new concessions that go beyond the Oslo agreements in order to win Palestinian compliance with security responsibilities that are within the Oslo agreements. Rather than facing sanction for its adoption of violence, the Palestinian Authority is expecting to be rewarded.

Despite all the difficulties and risks involved, the Government of Israel is determined to make this peace process work. Rather than become mired in the nuances of the Interim Agreement, Israel has recommended that the parties quickly enter and accelerate their negotiations over permanent status. To achieve success in these negotiations, both Israelis and Palestinians will have to adjust their expectations. Israel has begun to adjust its expectations in accordance with Palestinian aspirations; the Palestinians need to adjust their expectations in accordance with Israeli interests and concerns.

For diplomacy must take into account the true context of Israel's situation. Fifty years ago, the General Assembly adopted the majority report of the United

Nations Special Committee on Palestine and adopted a resolution calling for partition and the creation of a Jewish State. Within a half a year, the State of Israel was declared — but it was promptly invaded by the armies of five Arab States that rejected out of hand the General Assembly resolution. From that time onward, no one could talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in isolation from this broader context; Israelis and Palestinians are not located on an island in the Indian Ocean. As a result, any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must not rob Israel of its capacity for self-defence in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

That imperative became clear again when Israel faced a broad coalition of armies that had massed their forces on our armistice lines during the months of May and early June 1967. In the Six Day War that ensued, Israel came into control of the West Bank and became determined never to return to the vulnerable 1967 lines that had invited aggression. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) recognized that need in its call for "secure and recognized boundaries" and its rejection of full Israeli withdrawal from all the new territories that were placed under Israeli administration.

Israel's quest for secure borders against potential adversarial coalitions remains a vital necessity. New factors in military strategy have not altered these considerations. The 1991 Gulf War demonstrated that wars in the Middle East are not decided by ballistic missile barrages, but by the movement of conventional land armies. In any case, Middle East defence resources in the 1990s are still being poured into ground force modernization, into armour and self-propelled artillery. Increasingly, the slow-moving infantry formations of 30 years ago have been replaced throughout the region with rapid armoured and mechanized divisions. This qualitative shift has transpired not only in Syria but also in Iraq, which historically has dispatched large expeditionary forces against Israel, in 1948, in 1967 and again in 1973. Indeed, the combined divisional strength poised to Israel's east rivals the power once aimed at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization by the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe at the height of the cold war.

The West Bank has served as a formidable barrier protecting Israel's densely populated coastal plane from conventional military attack. Its 3,000-foot north-south hill ridge is set against an area that is 1,200 feet below sea level, thereby creating a 4,200-foot incline for any attacking army. Israeli deployments along its sparsely populated eastern slopes, and the routes of access for their reinforcement, have become the front line of Israel's defence in the east. And given the three-minute flight time from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea for combat aircraft, the West Bank's airspace and hilltops remain critical components of Israel's air defence. These considerations of topography, space and time become all the more important with the asymmetry between Israel's own small standing army, which requires reserve reinforcement, and the huge standing armies that are arrayed to its east.

Addressing Palestinian claims can help modify the intentions of some of the Arab States to Israel's east. But no stable arrangement can be structured in the long term if it addresses intentions alone, without taking into account these regional military capabilities. It is possible to reach a permanent status solution between Israel and the Palestinians that fully takes into account Israel's vital needs for its self-defence. This will require both flexibility and creativity; it will also require new political thinking. Israel and the Palestinians must find a third way between unbridled Palestinian self-determination and the past record of Israeli military control.

Across the world today — from Ireland to Bosnia, from Afghanistan to Angola — the State system is threatened by dozens of ethno-religious conflicts. Should the principle of unbridled self-determination be applied in every case, the world we know of approximately 185 States will quickly turn into a world of 300 States, in which every tribe and linguistic group seeks independence. This development will not only lead to increasing instability in the Middle East, it will also become the main cause of strategic instability across the entire globe.

Forty years after the demise of the European colonial empires, it is imperative that the world find a balance between the free expression of peoples' national aspirations and the requirements of international security in the twenty-first century. For the world has moved from an era in which decolonization was the primary international concern to an era having to contend with global "Lebanonization".

The "question of Palestine", as it is called in the United Nations, today has implications that go well beyond the Middle East. In each of the difficult post-cold-war conflicts today, common features arise: illegal arms have not been confiscated, radio transmitters incite peoples to violence and direct and proxy terrorism is still a chosen instrument for winning political advantage. If these acts are not stopped by the Palestinian Authority in our conflict, other regions will learn this lesson. If the systematic use of violence by the Palestinian Authority is rewarded with increased pressures for new Israeli concessions, then violence will come to undermine every process of reconciliation between peoples worldwide.

At the same time, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that addresses both Palestinian aspirations and Israeli needs can serve as a model for the entire world. Despite the disappointment that has grown in Israel in recent years, the hand of peace of all Israelis is extended to our Palestinian partners. The best way to surmount the present environment is for both parties to renew their dedication to resolve all outstanding differences peacefully, in direct, face-to-face negotiations. It is time to begin immediate negotiations on a permanent settlement. United Nations resolutions today that prejudge the outcome of these negotiations do not advance the parties one inch towards reaching peace. Such resolutions simply damage the peace process.

I call on the Member States of the United Nations, particularly Israel's old friends in Africa, Asia and South America, to encourage direct negotiations and to free themselves from mandatory bloc voting. The challenge between Israel and the Palestinians is great, but both peoples are capable of achieving the common purpose that was set out by our leaders four years ago.

Ms. Eshmambetova (Kyrgyzstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Marzuki (Malaysia): My delegation is seriously concerned about the current status of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which, having started off well following the signing of the Oslo accords, have since encountered a series of serious setbacks. Quite clearly, the disappointing lack of progress in these talks stems from the extreme, hard-line position adopted by the Netanyahu Government. Unilateral decisions and actions taken by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, are a clear manifestation of this hard-line approach and its lack of commitment to the full implementation of agreements signed with the Palestinians. This has resulted in the deterioration of the security situation in the area and placed the peace process in serious jeopardy.

Despite repeated calls by the international community to desist from its uncompromising policies, the Israeli Government continues to pursue these policies in violation of the Israeli-Palestinian accords. These policies include attempts to alter the status and demographic composition of Jerusalem, the confiscation of Palestinian lands and the demolition of Arab houses, as well as the continued delay in fully implementing the provisions of the Interim Agreement. Under the present Israeli Government there has been an unprecedented increase in settlement activities throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Since it assumed power in June 1996 the Government has authorized and encouraged the construction of some 19,000 housing units in existing Jewish settlements, as well as new settlements such as in Jebel Abu Ghneim, completely oblivious to international condemnation and in clear violation of the provisions of the Interim Agreement. What is clear is that this settlement policy is the culmination of an overall grand strategy which since 1967 has led to the confiscation of at least 70 per cent of the Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the construction of 38,500 housing units for the Israelis at the expense of the Palestinians. Indeed, as many as 2,300 houses belonging to the Palestinians have been demolished since 1967, and from January to early September 1997 alone, 100 Palestinian houses have been razed to the ground.

It is transparent that the policies being pursued by the Israeli Government with regard to the Arab residents in Jerusalem, including the demolition of their houses to make way for Jewish settlements, confiscation of their identity cards and other forms of harassment, as documented in document A/52/35, are motivated by the Israeli Government's agenda to change the demographic character of the city, designed to pre-empt the outcome of the permanent status talks on Jerusalem. While the furtherance of this policy is in clear violation of the Interim Agreement of 1993, it also contravenes Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980), and in particular the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. These violations of international law compelled the General Assembly to convene the tenth emergency special session in April 1997, and to resume it twice, in July and October. Resolutions of that session have, *inter alia*, recommended that the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention convene a conference on measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and to ensure respect for the Convention, in accordance with common article 1.

The continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian Arab lands has seriously impacted on the Palestinian economy in the occupied territories. It has led to extreme hardship on the part of the Palestinian people as a whole, whose freedom of movement has been severely restricted pursuant to Israel's policy of closure in many parts of the occupied territories. This has resulted in further deterioration of the Palestinian economy, characterized by continuing high unemployment and a significant decrease in real wages. In the Gaza Strip the unemployment rate is estimated at a depressing 50 to 60 per cent. In the last four years the annual income of Palestinians has dropped sharply, from $1,800 to $950 in the West Bank and from $1,200 to $600 in the Gaza Strip, forcing an increasing number of Palestinians to live in miserable slums amidst deplorable social, living and health conditions. The appalling situation which Palestinians in the occupied territories find themselves in are further aggravated by a rapidly deteriorating infrastructure, such as damaged roads, lack of clean water, inadequate housing and poor health services.

Given the plight of the Palestinian people under occupation, it remains the responsibility of the United Nations to provide much needed economic, social and other assistance pending the resolution of the question of Palestine. In this connection, my delegation wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the various United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for their admirable role and untiring involvement in alleviating the hardships faced by the Palestinians. UNRWA plays a leading role, especially in the fields of education, health, relief and social services, and its programmes are without doubt among the most laudable of the United Nations. My delegation is, however, concerned that UNWRA's budget shortfalls will seriously affect its activities. It is therefore critical for the international community to continue to provide adequate and predictable financing to UNRWA. For its part, Malaysia will continue to make its modest contribution beyond and above its bilateral assistance to Palestine, consistent with its continuing support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle for a homeland of their own.

Until the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestine issue, it is incumbent upon Israel, as a Member of this Organization, to abide by all relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the same time, Israel must faithfully commit itself to implementing the provisions of all agreements reached with the Palestinians in good faith and without delay. It must make every effort to refrain from taking actions which will undermine further the fragile framework of negotiations which has been put in place following the Oslo accords.

Unless and until a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is achieved, the international community cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the Middle East conflict, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Indeed, the international community must redouble its efforts to ensure Israel's full compliance with its international obligations.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset I should like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts in connection with the peace process in the Middle East. I should also like to express our gratitude to Ambassador Ibra Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee, for the report submitted to the General Assembly at this session.

Since the convening of the emergency Arab summit meeting in Cairo in June last year, and the crucial decisions adopted there, a spirit of optimism and determination had prevailed throughout the Arab homeland for pursuing the peace process on the basis of firm and serious foundations which would enable us to address the present grave challenges. The decisions adopted by the Arab summit came in response to the sensitive phase of the peace process. At the Cairo summit, the Arab leaders committed themselves at the Cairo summit to achieve a just and comprehensive peace as an irreversible strategic objective and option, to be pursued within the framework of international legality.

Despite this Arab position, a position which bolsters the principles of the peace process, the Israeli Government has ignored legitimate Arab rights and all the accords previously reached and has totally reneged on its obligations. Furthermore, the Israeli Government has adopted a policy of intensified suppression and oppression of the Palestinian people, the consolidation of its occupation of Arab territories occupied since 1967, and the pursuit of a practice of fait accompli.

The Committee, in its report contained in document A/52/35, expressed its increasing concern over the deterioration of the situation and the intensification of violence and tension in the occupied territories. The Committee also expressed its concern that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced serious setbacks owing to the position of the Government of Israel on the various aspects of the peace process. In this context, the Committee also expressed its deep concern for the lack of respect by the Israeli side for the agreements already signed with the Palestinian counterparts.

The Arab States consider that Israel is responsible for impeding progress in the peace process and perhaps collapsing it entirely.

Here we have the international community, through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, attributing responsibility for this setback to the Israeli authorities. The Committee calls on Israel to return to the peace process and to submit to the will of the international community.

Israel's answer to the Arab States and the international community is to continue building more new settlements and to expand the existing ones, in both its declarations and its deeds.

Thus statements made by representatives of various Israeli Government agencies and what we have heard in the Israeli Knesset demonstrate that there is a relentless effort being made to preserve the presence of Jewish colonialist settlers and to reinforce that presence in the West Bank, including Arab East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Work is under way to construct a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in Jerusalem (Al-Quds Al-Sharif) despite the demands of the international community that Israel stop this construction. These calls were made at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, convened this year under the "Uniting for Peace" resolution, on the three occasions that it met.

The Israeli Ministry of Industry and Trade approved a $30 million programme to encourage investment in a number of settlements, including four in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Ministry of Defence approved a plan for the construction of 1,550 housing units in the settlement of Givat Zeev, north of Jerusalem. The Knesset Finance Committee approved a special allocation of $16 million for the reinforcement of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Furthermore, the Israeli Ministry of the Treasury announced last May the allocation of $16.5 million for further development of Jewish settlements as part of the Israeli Government's decision to establish a special development centre for the settlements.

The Israeli authorities continue to pursue a policy of collective punishment in its various forms, from demolition of houses to mass expulsions and the imposition of a total blockade of the Palestinian territories.

From September 1993 — the signing of the peace accord — until now, the Israelis have demolished 270 houses in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Among these, there were 22 houses which were demolished during the time of the Labour Government. Since the Netanyahu Government took office, that is, from 29 May 1996 and up to 29 May 1997, 180 houses were demolished, and some 500 more houses are targeted for demolition in the near future. That is because the Israeli authorities demolish the houses of persons thought to have committed, or who are suspected of committing, what Israel calls security offenses — merely on suspicion — as can be seen from the international reports submitted to us.

The estimates provided to us by the United Nations indicate that the Palestinian gross national product in the occupied territories declined by 20 per cent between 1993 and the end of 1996, even though the World Bank expected that the Palestinian economy would grow by 4 per cent after the Oslo accords. Those estimates indicate that the rate of unemployment ranges between 40 and 45 per cent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The total loss suffered by the Palestinian economy during the period 1992 to 1996 amounted to $6 billion — all as a result of the continuing Israeli practices in regard to the strangulation of the Palestinian people, the imposition of the blockade, and the closure of Palestinian territories.

The report submitted to us in document A/52/35 states that Israel continued arbitrarily to impose closure in response to its alleged security needs and that the harsh retaliatory measures on the part of the Israeli Government would dangerously exacerbate the state of the Palestinian economy, resulting in greater hardship and despair among the Palestinian population.

The Israeli authorities pursue an arbitrary colonialist hegemonic policy in East Jerusalem, likened in the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories submitted to the General Assembly, contained in document A/52/131/Add.2, to a policy of "ethnic cleansing". Here I would like to quote from the report:

> "The gravity of the situation in East Jerusalem is compounded further by the recent withdrawal on a massive scale of identity cards of Palestinian

> Jerusalemites. Witnesses who testified before the Special Committee have described this policy as amounting to a silent deportation or even ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem's Arab population, who are being treated as resident aliens. It is estimated that some 60,000 to 80,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites, who have to prove that the City is their 'centre of their life', are threatened with losing their residency rights, which has given rise to a pervasive feeling of insecurity among the population. This discriminatory policy, applied to the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem ... has, among other things, serious repercussions for health insurance, education, housing and freedom of movement. None of these apply to Israelis." (A/52/131/Add.2, p. 5)

Moreover, Israel's policies regarding Jerusalem resulted in violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers, especially in the wake of the opening by Israel on 24 September 1996 of the so-called Western Wall Tunnel under the compound of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the first kiblah and the third holiest mosque in the Islamic world.

The international community should stand up to this Israeli challenge and intransigence, which are undermining the peace process in the Middle East. Arab acceptance of the principles of the peace process, anchored on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978), and on the principle of land for peace, in no way implies acceptance of the current Israeli practice of Judaizing occupied Arab territory by building new settlements and expanding the existing ones, or of the attempts to Judaize the holy Arab city of Jerusalem and to obliterate its Arab and Islamic physical character through a fait accompli policy.

The States which signed the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 are called upon to put pressure on Israel to implement the provisions of that Convention within the occupied Arab territories, including Holy Jerusalem.

The Government of Saudi Arabia, which is the custodian of the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina, has accorded special, primordial importance to the peace process in the Middle East since its inception in Madrid, and throughout, until it reached the current crossroads. The Government of Saudi Arabia has provided all forms of assistance to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate their sufferings and help them fulfil their national aspirations in building their independent State on their national Palestinian soil. Along with Arab sister States, the Government of Saudi Arabia will continue to make its maximum efforts for the resumption of the peace process on all tracks, so that a just and lasting peace can be achieved in the Middle East, and so that the region may again enjoy the blessings bestowed upon it by God, the Almighty.

The international community, especially the two sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East, namely, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, as well as the European Union, is called upon to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli authorities to make them comply with the resolutions of international legality with regard to the question of Palestine and the Middle East peace process.

We maintain that the expeditious resumption of the peace process on all tracks through the effective implementation of the Oslo accords, especially the 34 accords signed by the Israeli and Palestinian sides, as well as the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace through full Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), are the viable road to ensuring the return of security to the region and its emergence from this state of freeze, tension and violence in order for the Middle East region to continue its rich contribution to the construction of world civilization.

I wish to close my remarks today by quoting from the Holy Koran:

> "On that account: We ordained
> For the Children of Israel
> That if any one slew
> A person — unless it be
> For murder for spreading
> Mischief in the land —
> It would be as if
> He slew the whole people:
> And if any one saved a life,
> It would be as if he saved
> The life of the whole people.
> Then although there came
> To them Our Apostles
> With Clear Signs, yet,
> Even after that, many
> Of them continued to commit
> Excesses in the land." [*The Holy Koran, V*]

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is considering this agenda item, "Question of Palestine", in the midst of special international and regional circumstances, characterized by the obvious frustration of the international community in general and the peoples of the Middle East in particular at the very dangerous impasse to which the peace track has come in the recent period.

The reason for this, as is known to all, is primarily the intransigent position adopted by the present Israeli Administration since its assumption of power. Indeed, the present Israeli Administration has endeavoured to undermine the bases of the peace process as a whole. To begin with, it has reneged on the primary principle on which the process, since the 1991 peace conference in Madrid, was based, namely, land for peace. In addition, the Israeli Administration has attempted to go back on its contractual commitments reached with the Palestinian side. Israel's negative position is characterized by a number of arbitrary and oppressive measures, such as its refusal to withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories, a measure that was clearly stipulated in all the agreements with the Palestinian National Authority. It has returned to a policy of Judaization and settlerism in Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, in total contradiction of the letter and spirit of the resolutions of the international community, particularly those of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

This Israeli political approach is also made clear by the repressive measures taken by this Israeli Administration against the Palestinian people, such as the confiscation of land of Palestinians, the expropriation of their properties by a variety of means, including the use of force and duplicitous methods, forced displacement and the provocation of Palestinians by settlers, which is encouraged. The Israeli Administration is also adopting policies of collective punishment of Palestinian citizens, such as the closing off of Palestinian land and the imposition of economic siege.

As a result of this unacceptable approach, the hopes generated by the peace process have completely come to an end, and the prospects of peace which the peoples of the region and other peace-loving peoples aspired to have vanished. Consequently the climate of doubt even with regard to the feasibility of some of the positive steps that were supposed to accompany the peace process, particularly the regional economic conferences and the multilateral coordination meetings, has prevailed. This is the logic of the saying: "if the root is gone, the branch is no more". The logic of confrontation and violence is overshadowing the whole region, and threatening the peace and stability of all its peoples.

The situation in occupied Palestine would not have reached the present deteriorated stage had the international community been firm and determined in putting an end to Israeli continued violations of the international resolutions with regard to the question of the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular. The inability of the Security Council to adopt a firm position with regard to these problems has led in one way or another to further transgressions by the Israeli Administration in pursuit of its objectionable policies. As a result, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly was reconvened twice this year, which is clear evidence of the awareness of the international community of the dangers of the situation and of the need to confront the intransigence pursued by the Israeli Administration and to force it to comply with international legality.

This position was also clearly expressed when the General Assembly adopted by overwhelming majority a decision to convene a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949.

The responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestinian people will remain as long as that people's case remains without a just and lasting solution that will guarantee their right to establish their own independent State with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. The solution to this problem, by its nature, must be part of a comprehensive and just solution to the Middle East question in its entirety. Any attempt to achieve just peace in the area must include the end of Israeli occupation in all Arab territories, including Holy Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 497 (1981) and 425 (1978). Algeria believes this is the only serious solution possible for the Israeli administration and that it would guarantee the return of Arab territories to their rightful owners, defuse the risk of war in the region and create a climate of confidence conducive to the establishment of a comprehensive, just, comprehensive and lasting peace that would ensure a peaceful life for all peoples of the region.

Mr. Samhan Al-Nuaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, it is my pleasure to express our gratitude to Ambassador Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee for their excellent report, which reflects the Committee's untiring efforts to record the destructive effects of the unjust practices and measures of the Israeli occupation on the social, economic and political situation of the Palestinian people and on the peace process in the Middle East, as well as to keep the international community informed of the basic elements of the question of Palestine and its development.

In 1947, at its second session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which divided Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish. That resolution that was the basis of a whole series of important resolutions adopted subsequently over the course of the past 50 years, which were designed to find a solution to the question of Palestine. By way of example, I would like to mention General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948, which dealt with the refugee problem, Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which requested Israel to withdraw its armed forces from occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, and resolution 338 (1973), which called for the parties to the conflict to start negotiations aimed at settling the problem and mobilized the attention of the international community. A number of other resolutions have reaffirmed the Arab character of Al-Quds al-Sharif.

We are constantly concerned by the fact that, notwithstanding all those resolutions, on the basis of which the Madrid Peace Conference was organized and other agreements have been reached between the two parties, Palestinian and Israeli, notwithstanding the tireless efforts of the United Nations and its specialized agencies and those of regional States and bodies to help the Palestinian people attain the enjoyment of their just and inalienable rights, all of those initiatives have come up against Israel's pernicious policies, namely, the expansion of settlements and inhumane repression throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

Thus, the Palestinians continue to become displaced persons and refugees and to perish by the tens of thousands. In addition, national economic and social infrastructures have been destroyed with unprecedented criminal violations of humanitarian and moral principles and standards.

The disappointing results in the development of the question of Palestine and the complications encountered, which recently culminated in the illegal and illegitimate practices of the Israeli Government, have revealed to the entire world the true intentions of that Government, which strives to perpetuate its presence as occupying Power in the Palestinian and Arab territories by violence, hegemony and the illegal expansion of settlements and to fulfil its aggressive designs at the expense of the rights and the legitimate historical property of the Arab and Palestinian peoples.

Despite the results of the 1991 Madrid Conference, despite the 1993 Declaration of Principles and the other agreements reached between the two parties, Palestinian and Israeli, which represented a vital turning point and a propitious opportunity to arrive at a peaceful, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian problem, and while the majority of the world's countries were rejoicing, the peace process continued to suffer setbacks because of the Israeli Government's systematic and serious violations of the obligations under those arrangements and the other agreements it had entered into under the provisions of international law, the United Nations Charter, the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant international resolutions.

The entire world has unanimously recognized, on many occasions and in many regional and international bodies, and especially at successive meetings of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, that the Israeli Government's policy of confiscating Palestinian and Arab territories as well as the building of settlements in those territories, in particular in the Holy City Al-Quds, revered by all revealed religions, constitute flagrant violations by Israel of the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territories by force. It is also a matter of vital concern because a close study of the reports and relevant international statistics reveals that the rate and expansion of those settlements and their occupation by Jewish immigrants and settlers has doubled. Further, such practices have become even more arbitrary since the Government began to deal in an irresponsible manner with the Islamic Holy Places by opening a tunnel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the occupied part of Al-Quds and the unprecedented establishment of a settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim south of Al-Quds as well as in other occupied Arab and Palestinian territories.

In addition, Israel is refusing to grant resident permits to native born citizens and is confiscating their lands and natural resources by means of expulsion, violence and the falsification of Palestinian property documentation in an attempt to alter the legal status and demographic composition of that Arab and Islamic Holy

City and of other occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, imposing a policy of fait accompli that is null and void and is rejected not only by the Palestinian people but by all the world's States and peoples who want to see peace and stability prevail in our Arab region.

For the last two years, the whole world has watched the increasing insecurity and the escalation of tension, violence and mistrust in the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories. Not by chance, these developments have coincided with the intensification of Israeli actions that make crystal clear that Israel is waffling, refusing to respect its obligations and commitments, in particular those involved in furthering the redeployment of its troops from the West Bank, the implementation of its programme for releasing hundreds of Palestinian and Arab detainees and prisoners and the re-opening of the Gaza airport and port. Further, Israel is constantly delaying the final status talks, including in particular the resolution of critical questions regarding Al-Quds, the refugees, settlements and borders.

Justifying its iron-fist policies on false security pretences, Israel is tightening the noose around the occupied territories by surrounding them, by imposing blockades and collective economic and other punishments on the towns and villages and by undertaking campaigns of violence, making arbitrary arrests and assassinating innocent civilians randomly and without justification. These actions comprise a great many flagrant violations of human rights and of Israel's obligations under the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and other instruments of international humanitarian law, and under the Madrid Peace Conference and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace.

The United Arab Emirates has always condemned all these illegal Israeli actions and their dangerous consequences. These actions have destabilized — indeed, undermined — the very foundations of the peace accords and the confidence-building measures undertaken with the Palestinian side. Therefore, we would like to reaffirm here the need for the international community — as represented by the United Nations, the two co-sponsors of the peace process and the European Union — to redouble its efforts to lead the Israeli Government to comply with the resolutions of international law.

The actions required include, in particular, the calling of an emergency meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to examine Israel's violations of its terms, as well as ways and means of convincing Israel to desist from these violations and to observe in full the just requirements for the comprehensive and final resolution of the Palestinian question. These requirements include the immediate cessation of all illegal settlement activities in Al-Quds and in all the other Arab and Palestinian occupied territories, the dismantling of all the existing settlements, progress in the meeting of Israel's obligations regarding the re-opening of the Gaza port and airport, the implementation of the plan for the redeployment of the Israeli troops from the West Bank and the immediate release of all the detainees. The Palestinian National Authority should also have the opportunity to receive financial support from the international community. It should have the power to build the Palestinian economy unhindered, and its development agencies should be allowed to carry out their work so that they can meet their responsibilities to improve the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people.

Finally, today, when the United Nations is celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the United Arab Emirates would like to renew its support for the Palestinian people and its leaders as they struggle for freedom. We reaffirm that a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question requires the implementation of the essential principles embodied in the resolutions of international legitimacy along with the institution of the confidence-building measures stipulated in the peace accords. Basically, these measures comprise the immediate cessation of illegal settlement building and the dismantling of existing settlements so as to allow the Palestinian people to be free and to enjoy the rights to return to their homes, to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State on their territory with its capital at Al-Quds. And all this should be on the basis of peace, security and sustainable development.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers tomorrow, Tuesday, 2 December 1997, at 3 p.m.

The observer of Palestine has requested to make a statement in reply. I now call on him in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Today we had the pleasure of listening to the representative of Israel make a statement that contained so many hallucinations that we felt that he was talking about a completely different reality from the one we know, or is living in a different world: a world that has different definitions of right and justice; a world with its own special law which differs from the international law with which we are acquainted; a world in which the concept of equality among nations and peoples does not exist. Perhaps this is the world of God's chosen people. Indeed, it is not our world, the world of the ordinary peoples of Asia, Africa, South America and, perhaps, Europe — East and West.

It is difficult to believe such a level of arrogance, self-aggrandizement and disdain for the realities by which the political discourse of the present Israeli Government is characterized and of which today's statement is an excellent example.

Here, and very briefly, I wish to remind the Israeli representative of a few things in the hope that he might perceive the reality, in however limited a way. The heart of the issue is the occupation — Israel's occupation. The end of this occupation is the prerequisite for peace.

Secondly, any attempt to compare the illegal settlements in the occupied territories to the Palestinian villages and towns is not only a violation of international law, the resolutions of the Security Council and the bases of the peace process, but is in fact racist and vile. It is even more dangerous than that — it is an invitation to the Palestinian side to raise the subject of its rights in Jaffa, Haifa and other Palestinian cities.

Thirdly, talk of Israel's basic and vital needs reminds us of hateful theories that should not be recalled here. Real security can be achieved through a just peace, not through insistence on vital needs, which we entirely reject.

Fourthly, the Israeli side needs to remember that the Palestinian people is proudly equal to the Israeli people and is neither a follower nor an ethnic minority. Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories is not a concession on its part; it is not even a choice. Mutual recognition is not something that was recognized beforehand by our side alone — it is the essence of the Declaration of Principles.

Fifthly, the Israeli representative's attempt to teach Member States how to vote is another example of objectionable arrogance. The time may have come for Israel to understand the meaning of the international unanimity vis-à-vis its illegal policies in the occupied territories.

Finally, we hope that the present Israeli Government will desist from its current approaches and policies and cease fabricating Palestinian violations of agreements in order to justify its own flagrant and continuous transgressions of these agreements. Israel should actually begin to implement the concluded agreements, which will help the peace process to move forward and guarantee the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

United Nations A/52/PV.59

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

59th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 2 December 1997, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 36 *(continued)*

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/52/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/581)

Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/52/571)

Letter from Namibia (A/52/704)

Draft resolutions (A/52/L.49, L.50, L.51, L.52, L.53)

Mr. de Silva (Sri Lanka): May I at the outset convey the Sri Lankan delegation's thanks to Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his introductory statement on the report of the Committee (A/52/571). We wish to express our appreciation for the valuable work which that Committee has accomplished during the period under review.

As we look back at the past year, among the significant events was the signing of the Protocol concerning the redeployment in Hebron in January 1997. It was a positive development in that over 80 per cent of the city was transferred to the Palestine Authority. But the expectations and hopes that this would herald better times for the Palestinians have not materialized. On the contrary, the situation has taken on a gloomy aspect, and the chill winds of despair are blowing once again. The commencement of construction of a settlement by Israel in Jebel Abu Ghneim called Har Homa, to the south of East Jerusalem, has brought about new tensions, heightened the sense of crisis and impeded the peace process on which many hopes were based.

While the terrorist bombings in Israel are to be deplored and cannot be condoned, as they aggravate the situation, it still has to be recognized that Israel cannot disclaim its share of the blame, for such acts of desperation are to be expected when oppression increases and hopes are blasted. Such unfortunate occurrences might have been avoided had Israel heeded the expressions of deep concern expressed by the international community, as manifested in repeated resolutions of the General Assembly. Israel's actions reveal the determination to carry out its policies, regardless of these admonitions, in a unilateral fashion, violating all principles of international law regulating the conduct of an occupying power. They also indicate an unwillingness to honour the agreements into which Israel has entered and show a resolute attempt to alter the status and demographic character of Jerusalem.

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

It is the widely held view of members of the international community that peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine is pivotal to the wider question of peace in the Middle East. The United Nations was primarily responsible for the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and on that occasion determined Israel's boundaries. The remainder of the contiguous territory that was under the British mandate quite obviously fell within what was intended to be the Arab State in Palestine. The occupation of this land by Israel following the 1967 war was clearly illegal, and its continued occupation is in violation of the Charter. Its unlawful character has been underscored in successive United Nations resolutions. The United Nations has therefore a moral obligation to ensure the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinians. My delegation does not share the view that the United Nations is not the best forum for the resolution of this dispute, though it welcomes every effort, from whatever quarter it may proceed, to achieve a peaceful end to this conflict.

We acknowledge the valuable work done by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in seeking to safeguard and promote these rights. We also appreciate the humanitarian work undertaken by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in assisting Palestinian refugees. And we appreciate the assistance rendered in socio-economic fields to strengthen peace.

My delegation believes that it is an essential element for the successful accomplishment of the objectives of the peace process that the Government of Israel should adhere to the foundational principles which are reflected in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and to the fundamental principle of exchanging land for peace. Israel should complete the withdrawal of its troops from areas B and C of the occupied West Bank. We reaffirm our support for the peace process, which unfortunately is now in a state of frozen inactivity that very nearly resembles a body in a condition of rigor mortis. We call upon all parties concerned to help in the resuscitation and reactivation of this process in the interests of the whole Middle East.

It is futile to pay lip service to the peace agreement while systematically seeking to erode its efficacy by creating conditions on the ground that are at variance with the very foundations for peace, as they make a final settlement an ever- receding chimera. My delegation appeals to the conscience of all members of this Assembly to take some meaningful action to relieve the people of Palestine of their sufferings, which have gone on for far too long and are beyond human endurance.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I should like first to pay tribute to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and especially its Chairman, Mr. Ka, for the remarkable work it has done to support the Palestinian people, their struggle and their sacrifices.

As it does every year, the General Assembly is once again examining the question of Palestine within the framework of its consideration of this question over several decades. It adopted the partition resolution of 1947 related to this question, which it has followed closely, and on which it has adopted many other resolutions each year, under either the item on Palestine or the item on the situation on the Middle East.

In its resolutions on this issue, the General Assembly, in the name of the entire international community, underscored that the question of Palestine lies at the core of the Israeli-Arab conflict and that this just cause must be settled in a peaceful fashion so as to guarantee the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people in the conflict, particularly its right to self-determination. That right cannot be denied under any pretext.

In a number of the resolutions it adopts each year, the General Assembly has also expressed its full support for the peace process and the agreements reached between the Palestinian and Israeli parties, most recently in resolution 51/29 of 4 December 1996. The Assembly has also expressed the hope that the peace process will lead to the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East that would guarantee a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. In that regard, the General Assembly has underscored the need to ensure scrupulous implementation of the agreements between the two parties.

Unfortunately, the developments we have witnessed since the last session of the General Assembly are not consonant with these appeals of the Assembly. On the contrary, the situation in the occupied territories, and in the Middle East in general, has taken a turn for the worse, thus giving rise to deep concern.

The peace process is today at a standstill, completely blocked by Israeli policies and measures that repudiate the principles and the mandate of the peace process that began at Madrid. The most important of these principles are that of land for peace and those in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Israel has also violated all of the agreements reached with the Palestinian side and has evaded its obligations under those agreements, including the agreements on the redeployment of its troops.

Israel is not willing to respect the agreed timetable. On the contrary, it persists in its illegal policies and acts in the occupied Palestinian territory. It has not put and end to its settlement activities in the occupied territories, going so far as to step up those activities, building new settlements in the south of East Jerusalem, at Jebel Abu Ghneim. Israel is stubbornly continuing to build this settlement, despite all the repeated appeals made by this Assembly in the three resolutions adopted in the framework of the emergency special session convened in April, July and November this year.

Israel is again flagrantly defying the will of the international community and persisting in imposing faits accomplis and creating new realities on the ground, with a view to influencing the outcome of negotiations on the final status, in particular the final status of Jerusalem. Other Israeli practices and measures designed to modify the status of the city of Jerusalem have the same objective. These measures include the withdrawal of identity cards from the Arab population, the demolition of houses, collective punishment of the Palestinian people, the imposition of an economic blockade and other arbitrary measures.

The international community, whose living conscience is represented by this Assembly, has vigorously denounced these Israeli measures, which risk undermining the entire peace process because of the frustration and despair they have engendered in the Palestinian people, as well as in Arab and international public opinion.

Israel bears responsibility for blocking the peace process and all the risks of failure that that entails, as well as for the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the region in general. Israel has violated its commitments and evaded its obligations under the mandate of the peace process, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), all of the other relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the agreements concluded. We therefore call on Israel to put an end to its intransigence, procrastination and illegal practices in Jerusalem and the rest of the occupies Palestinian territory; in particular, immediately to cease its settlement activities and arbitrary practices aimed at modifying the status of Jerusalem, erasing its Arabic and Islamic character and altering its demographic composition; and to halt its imposition of economic blockade against the Palestinian people. The current Israeli Government must also implement all its agreements with the Palestinian side and take part in negotiations on a definitive settlement in accordance with the agreed timetable. Given this situation, the international community is called upon resolutely to stand up to the Israeli challenge and to put pressure on the Government of Israel so that it will respond to the demands of the international community, scrupulously respect its commitments and put an end to its illegal acts.

The General Assembly also has a historical responsibility towards the Palestinian people. This responsibility must continue to be shouldered until the legitimate national rights of that people are realized, in particular the right to the creation of an independent State on its own territory, with Jerusalem as its capital. The United Nations also plays a vital role in supporting the peace process through economic and social assistance to the Palestinian people. That role should continue, and the donors should also continue to support the reconstruction of the Palestinian economy.

In his message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia, stated:

> "The blocking of the peace process and the agreements on which it is based foreshadows all the risks of conflict, violence and instability to which the region will be exposed. Tunisia therefore calls on the international community, in particular the two sponsors of the peace process, to act rapidly in exerting pressure on Israel to persuade it to respect its international commitments, as well as the mandate on which the peace process has been based from the outset, especially the principle of land for peace, and its commitment to respect international law and to implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and all the relevant General Assembly resolutions so as to create the appropriate conditions to foster a peaceful, comprehensive, just and lasting solution, to guarantee the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon and to enable all the peoples of the region to live in peace and security.

> Tunisia will continue firmly to support the Palestinian people in its struggle to regain its legitimate rights and create an independent State on its own territory, with Jerusalem as its capital."

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform members that in connection with this item, an amendment to the draft resolution contained in document A/52/L.53 has been issued as document A/52/L.59. This is now being distributed to delegations in the Hall.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): As many speakers have already mentioned, on 29 November it was 50 years since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), according to which Palestine was partitioned into a Jewish State and an Arab State. Through all these years the question of Palestine — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict — has remained among the most persistent and sensitive problems in modern history. Although this problem is no longer associated with a large-scale armed conflict, it continues to be a source of grave concern for the United Nations and for the world community as a whole.

There is no need to prove that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question can be achieved only on the basis of the full implementation by the parties of the agreements already reached in the framework of the Madrid peace process and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), including the principle of land for peace.

At the beginning of this year many of us felt optimistic and cherished new hopes for further progress on the road towards peace. Unfortunately, this optimism did not last long. Again we saw a stalemate in the peace process. Moreover, the deterioration of the situation in the region forced the United Nations to resort to extraordinary measures by convening the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which resumed its work on two other occasions in the course of the year.

In November, hope started to live again when the Israeli-Palestinian consultations on the resumption of negotiations took place. We welcome the active efforts of the sponsors of the Middle East peace process, the European Union and other international bodies, as well as of prominent political figures who are doing their best to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

Throughout the year the Middle East has witnessed numerous acts of terrorism and brutal violence which have caused heavy civilian casualties on both sides and put into real jeopardy the whole negotiating process.

With this in mind, I would like to reiterate that Ukraine strongly condemns all acts of terrorism, irrespective of who committed them and whatever their motivations were. We recognize that any terrorist attack evokes the need to take comprehensive and resolute retaliatory measures against its perpetrators. At the same time, we are not inclined to think that vengeance can be a guiding principle in taking decisions on such measures, which should not be excessive.

Therefore, we call on the parties to refrain from actions that could undermine a very fragile atmosphere of peace. In our view, at the current stage it is very important that the parties make every possible effort to overcome the existing animosity and confrontation and demonstrate their political wisdom and good will. Ukraine is convinced that any options other than direct, peaceful negotiations, held in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence, will lead nowhere.

The delegation of Ukraine maintains that attaining stable peace in the region and settling the Palestinian question will be impossible without economic development of territories under the Palestinian Authority and their speedy integration into the economic infrastructure of the whole region. In this regard, the wide-scale economic assistance provided to the Palestinian people by the international donor community remains indispensable. Mindful of that, my delegation commends the efforts of donor countries and financial institutions in this direction. Moreover, we find it especially important that various programmes and activities carried out by the United Nations bodies should continue to be aimed at mobilizing international economic support for and assistance to the Palestinian people.

The delegation of Ukraine is also of the view that the United Nations should carry on shouldering its primary responsibility for ensuring the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of self-determination. The role of the United Nations as a guarantor of the international legitimacy of the question of Palestine cannot be diminished, since it was to a large extent this Organization that initiated this process half a century ago. Therefore, the eventual settlement of the question of Palestine should be reached with the active involvement of the United Nations. The

United Nations should prove that it has enough power and authority in influencing this process.

In conclusion, I would like to reconfirm Ukraine's continued commitment to support peaceful settlement in the Middle East and its readiness to make a meaningful contribution to facilitate further progress in the solution of the question of Palestine.

Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania): With the marking of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People fresh in our minds, the United Republic of Tanzania continues to believe that the Palestinian question is at the core of the situation in the Middle East. We therefore strongly hold that a just and reasonable solution and the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people are the keys to the goal of peace, stability and development in the Middle East.

The road towards that objective has been long and arduous. And yet the parties have come a long way. In the last six years we have witnessed significant movement towards the achievement of a lasting peace in the region. The Oslo accords, the Madrid Peace Conference and the Washington Declaration stand as testimony to that important movement.

It was in recognition of those positive achievements that my President, His Excellency Benjamin W. Mkapa, addressing the Assembly in October 1996, expressed our hope that we had:

> "reached a time when we thought that our dreams for the peaceful coexistence of the Palestinian people and the Israeli people were on the verge of coming true." [Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, plenary meetings, 22nd meeting, p. 4]

Our hope then was that those accomplishments would culminate in the achievement of the comprehensive and lasting peace we all desire. It was in the same vein that early this year the Hebron Protocol between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel, leading to the withdrawal of Israel forces from Hebron, was welcomed. Events following the Hebron agreement are a matter of public record. Given the achievements and the hope that had been engendered, there was profound disappointment that Israel reneged on its negotiated commitments and took measures which seriously undermined the progress so far made towards peace and stability in the region.

Regrettably, in spite of two resumptions of the emergency session of the General Assembly and a series of other meetings, the confidence shattered by the actions of the Israeli authorities has yet to be recovered. It is therefore a matter of the utmost concern to us that 1997 seems to be a lost year. It is also a matter of serious regret that a year which was ushered in by the hope of the Hebron Protocol should record such dismal progress.

The current stalemate in the Middle East peace process is not in the interest of any of the parties. Indeed, it augurs badly for world peace. The Palestinian people have an inalienable right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own. So, too, have the Israelis. But peace can come only as a product of justice. It cannot be brought about by war or the unilateralism of one of the parties. The parties have to recommit themselves to work for peace based on justice — justice for all, without exception.

It is imperative that the peace process should not be allowed to collapse. The initiatives of the recent past have been bold and courageous. The negative developments we have witnessed this year must not be allowed to derail the implementation of the agreements so far concluded. This Assembly and the international community have a stake in preserving the integrity of the peace process. We should therefore encourage the parties to sustain the process. The Government of Israel has a particular responsibility in this regard. It should not be allowed to flout the will of the international community with impunity. It is the responsibility of the international community and the sponsors of the peace process to ensure that Israel complies with all its commitments. The Assembly therefore cannot, and should not, condone any actions which seek to deny the Palestinians their rights or undermine the peace process.

We remain optimistic, and therefore express our firm belief that the peace process is the only path to peace and security for the Palestinians as well as for Israel and the region. To do otherwise would be counter-productive. The achievements of the past have to be consolidated. There can never be losers and winners. Peace in the Middle East has a global impact. We appeal for common sense to prevail.

Mr. Al-Adoufi (Yemen) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: The item entitled "Question of Palestine" is not new to this Organization; the General Assembly has been dealing with it for the last five decades. In an attempt to resolve this issue it has adopted many resolutions which remain unimplemented.

However, what makes this session special, what makes its discussion of this item, "Question of Palestine", unique, and what, therefore, underlines its importance is that it is taking place following emergency special sessions held by the General Assembly this year on illegal Israeli acts in occupied East Jerusalem and the other occupied Palestinian territories, sessions which confirmed the illegitimacy and illegality of Israeli measures in the occupied Palestinian Arab territories. The great support demonstrated by the special sessions and the call for the convening of a conference of signatories of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, the High Contracting Parties to that Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, express the unanimous view of the international community on the stalling of the peace process as well as the need to resolve the Palestinian question on the basis of justice, peace and equality.

The stalling of the peace process, a process which began when the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel signed the agreement on the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements on 13 September 1993, is due to the policy of the Israeli Government, which is characterized by the use of all ways and means to hinder the agreement, to shirk previous commitments to withdraw from the Palestinian territories, and to move along this track to the second step in the Declaration of Principles, which was sponsored by the United States of America.

The Republic of Yemen, on the basis of its positive stance in support of the Middle East peace process, in line with the position taken by the Arab Summit in Cairo in June 1996, reaffirms its concern for a resumption of the peace process in the region. It supports the Declaration of Principles and all subsequent agreements, steps, accords and protocols, particularly the Protocol on expanding Palestinian self-rule, with a view to attaining the final phase for the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, the freeing of Palestinian prisoners and the dismantling of Israeli settlements.

The United Nations and the international community must continue to provide assistance to the Palestinian self-rule administration to enable it to face up to the current economic deterioration. They must also bring pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to cause it to renounce the policy of laying economic siege to the Palestinian Arab people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, establishing settlements, confiscating property, detaining tens of thousands of people, violating the principles of human rights and challenging the resolutions of international legitimacy. The international community must provide all types of assistance to the Arab Palestinian people so that they can tackle the problems of poverty, unemployment and disease.

The international community must also support the establishment of Palestinian economic and social institutions that would encourage the continuation of the peace process and propel the Israeli-Palestinian agreement towards the horizons of peace we all desire. In order to solidify these steps towards peace in the region, our country calls on those States encouraging the emigration of Jews to take positive measures to put an end to such emigration and subsequent settlement in Palestinian and Arab occupied territories. We call upon them to contribute to bringing pressure to bear on Israel to cease the building of settlements and the annexation of land by force. In this context, we call for a commitment to the resolutions of the various special sessions held this year, by refraining from providing any support for the building of settlements or any activities related to settlerism.

The question of Palestine is the core of the strife in the Middle East. Statements made on behalf of different international groupings at various times this year have expressed the wish of the international community to see stability and development in the region to be accomplished through recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people. We feel great satisfaction at the European summit held in Florence, where the European Union called for respect of the rights for the Palestinian people to self-determination, withheld recognition of the annexation of occupied East Jerusalem, and stressed the importance of that city for the parties in the region and, indeed, the entire international community — and not only from the viewpoint of the need to respect religious rights and institutions. The European Union also expressed the wish to continue its support for the resumption of final status negotiations based on the Oslo treaty and subsequent agreements between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. The summit also warned of the grave negative repercussions of the closure by Israel of the lands under the Palestinian Authority.

On the other hand, the European summit commended the cooperation by the Palestinian Authority with Israel in the security field, proceeding from the premise that Israel's security can be guaranteed through a peaceful settlement that would respect the interests of Palestinians as well as those of other parties to the peace process. The Summit of the G-7 and Russia also called for the lifting of the embargo on Palestinians, which only increases their economic suffering, as well as for the resumption of negotiations on the other tracks.

Taken together, these statements are to us a source of assurance and satisfaction with the peace process as sponsored by the United States of America. However, the American sponsor is urged, indeed required, to advance the peace process with momentum towards the resumption of negotiations based on the agreements and protocols already signed, and in accordance with the principles on which the peace process was built.

This session coincides with the emergence of dangerous developments that threaten peace and security in the Middle East region. These are represented by Israel's continuing alterations of the character of Holy Jerusalem and by the Israeli authorities' continuation of illegal practices perpetrated against the Palestinian people. We condemn and denounce those measures and practices of the Israeli authorities and their repeated aggression against Palestinian citizens in Arab Jerusalem and other Palestinian cities, which have led to the deaths of many martyrs, the wounding of hundreds, the demolition of homes, the building of bypass roads reserved exclusively for settlers, the continuing siege of Palestinian lands and Israel's refusal to withdraw its forces.

Therefore, we wish to reaffirm the need to respect human rights in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, we believe should be implemented with regard to the Palestinian people. We also call on the Israeli Government to cease its attacks on and sweeps conducted against Palestinian cities and villages. We call on the international community to bring pressure to bear on Israel so as to compel it to commit itself to international norms governing human rights and to the two international pacts relating to human rights.

This grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is likely to lead to a deterioration of the situation in the region and a return to the whirlpool of tension and violence, which would threaten peace and security in the Middle East region and throughout the whole world.

My country reaffirms the need to make rapid progress towards a final, just and comprehensive settlement based on the Madrid Conference, as well as the resolutions of international legitimacy, particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. We call on the sponsor of the peace process to push for its resumption in order to achieve a stable, just, and comprehensive peace that the region and the entire world can enjoy. We have not yet lost hope in what the international community can do in terms of efforts to reach these noble ends in order to avoid subjecting our planet to the scourge of war and terrible tragedies.

Mr. Abou-Hadid (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): There is no need to remind this Assembly that the question of Palestine has been inscribed on its agenda for 50 years. Our international Organization has witnessed the emergence of many new States. All of us welcomed them to this forum. Yet despite the long history of our Organization's linkage to the question of Palestine, we, regrettably, even after half a century, have yet to find a solution to this question.

Today we return to the question of Palestine once again, following the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. At that session, the entire world stood to express its rejection of Israeli settlement policy, indicating in no uncertain terms that such a policy raised fears and concerns regarding the fate and future of the peace process. This is because such a policy could lead to dangerous repercussions, and adverse consequences putting the region as a whole face to face with potentially ominous developments. There can be no doubt that this firm international stand explicitly indicates that the international community cannot recognize the legitimacy of occupation, settlement policies, and the confiscation of land, all of which are measures taken by the Netanyahu Administration. It considers these measures null and void and illegal. Moreover, this speedy response by the international community constitutes an explicit indication that all States of the entire world have come to realize the extent of the dangers resulting from Israeli expansionist settlement schemes. They have started to realize that these plans will explode the peace process and will force the situation towards more crises, complications and the creation of climates of acute tension. Not only does this situation threaten to shatter peace and stability in the Middle East; its consequences will have a negative impact on peace and stability in the world as a whole.

Mr. Boyd (Panama), Vice-President, took the chair.

In the wake of the recent tour by Mrs. Albright, the United States Secretary of State, and on the eve of the tripartite negotiations in Washington, Israel announced its confiscation of 1,200 dunums of Palestinian land to expand the so-called settlement of Maaleh Adumim. At the same time, Danny Naveh, the Cabinet Secretary of the Israeli Government stressed that his Government does not intend to give up new land to the Palestinian Authority and that it will continue to promote settlement and support and expand existing settlements. There can be no doubt that in adopting such provocative and extremist measures, which run radically counter to the will and direction of the international community, the Netanyahu Government is in fact pursuing a premeditated and programmed policy designed to demolish the forthcoming negotiations with the Palestinians, collapse the peace efforts of the United States of America and fabricate a climate of escalation that will make saving the peace process desperately difficult, if not impossible.

The international community is sick and tired of the provocative stances of the Netanyahu Government. It has demonstrated a noteworthy sympathy for the peace process and the just and legitimate demands of the Arabs to regain fully their occupied territory.

This in itself reflects the international community's rejection of Israel's racist and extremist practices and policies as well as its condemnation of Israel's misleading statements and its profound belief that peace in the region is not attainable in accordance with the whims of Mr. Netanyahu, but that it can be achieved only through respect for United Nations resolutions and commitment to the principle of Israel's full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the restoration of those territories to their rightful owners.

Today, as we celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, my delegation would like to express to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People its appreciation for the role it has played in mobilizing international public opinion in support of the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle to regain their inalienable rights to self-determination and to establish their own independent State on their national soil. In this connection, Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, addressed a message to the Committee on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity in which he affirmed Syria's steadfast support of the just cause of the Palestinian people and its sacrifices. He reaffirmed Syria's unwavering commitment to the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people both within and outside the occupied Palestinian territories.

A quick review of its recent report transmitted to the General Assembly indicates that the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories expressed its grave concern at the existing human rights situation in the occupied territories as a result of the settlerist policy pursued by the current Israeli Government. The report went on to state that:

> "On 2 August 1996 the Israeli Cabinet decided to cancel the previous Government's restrictions placed on the development of settlements since 1992. The confiscation of Arab-owned land, expansion of settlements and construction of bypass roads and quarries has continued unabated. New settlements have been built and their total in the Gaza Strip and West Bank is now estimated at 194. Settlement expansion in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan is also foreseen."

The report goes on to state that:

> "the most serious development in this connection is the decision taken on 26 February 1997 to build 6,500 Jewish housing units on the hill called Jabal Abu Ghneim. The beginning of construction on 18 March 1997 of the so-called Har Homa settlement in that location, which would complete the chain of Israeli settlements hermetically encircling Arab-populated East Jerusalem, has brought the peace process to a standstill." [A/52/131/Add.2, p. 5]

The gravity of the situation in East Jerusalem, the report notes, is compounded further by the recent withdrawal of identity cards of Palestinian Jerusalemites. That policy amounts to a silent deportation or even ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem's Arab population in a vile manner. All the Israeli policies being implemented in the occupied territories — such as the internal closures of Palestinian towns and suburbs, the continued restriction of freedom of movement, and the destruction of housing in Jerusalem and other parts of the occupied territories — are policies and practices to be condemned and must not be condoned.

In this context, on its visit to the occupied Syrian Golan, the Special Committee noted that Syrian citizens who express nationalistic sentiments regarding Syria, their motherland, are being repressed more harshly than before and that land in the occupied Syrian Golan continued to be confiscated for the expansion of construction of Israeli settlements and of bypass roads. The Israeli authorities continue to confiscate agricultural produce and cattle, and to exercise tight control over the water resources available to the inhabitants of the Golan, including rainwater.

In the field of education, the Israeli authorities have dismissed qualified teachers and altered the educational curricula regarding the political geography of the area, in addition to the non-recognition of diplomas granted by Syrian universities.

All of us follow the international efforts being made to salvage the peace process and to extricate it from the present deadlock and deathly freeze. These efforts are still thwarted by the Israeli intransigence and extremism that have led to the current deterioration and collapse, the loss of the language of political dialogue, the prevailing climate of tension, and the placing of the region again at the mouth of a volcano. All of these setbacks are the result of the approach taken by Israel and the mentality of its Premier, who has dropped the logic of peace from his perception and political lexicon and replaced it with the language of war, threats, aggression, settlerism and the abandonment of the terms and conditions of peace. That mentality has also led to his turning his back on the terms of reference of the Madrid peace process and on the implementation of United Nations and Security Council resolutions, and to persistence in adhering tenaciously to the occupation of the Arab territories, whose restoration lies at the heart of the problem and is the basis of any solution.

In a short period of time, the Likud Government has managed to cancel the whole preceding six-year period of strenuous Arab, American and international political efforts to end the conflict and achieve peace in the region on the basis of justice, comprehensiveness and the restoration of their legitimate rights to all legitimate claimants. It has emerged in its most inimical way in its programmes, positions, and policies towards any progress on the negotiating tracks. It has also declared its Biblical plan, returning to the line of argument with which the world is already fed up, leaving for itself the freedom of movement and option selection, and taking over Arab territories to meet alleged security needs which, it insists, should take priority over peace — an old argument that it continues to employ as a pretext for its aggression and policy of consolidation of occupation, and of faits accomplis on which it tries to bestow legitimacy. These policies are blatant evidence of Israel's rejection of a peace based on international legitimacy and of its insistence that it remain above the law and the instruments and resolutions of international legitimacy.

That is the reality, with Israel's leaders having washed their hands of the Madrid peace process, destroying it and attacking the agreements accomplished under it. Israel has resorted to escalation, established blockade and encirclement zones and set up antagonistic military alliances. There has been a failure to narrow chasms and remedy the crisis of trust, which increases in depth and seriousness, and we see the near end of the hopes for peace, brought about by Israel. Deterring Israel, curbing its policy and forcing its Government to change its conduct vis-à-vis the peace process through the application of Security Council resolutions and the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference, forcing it to pay the inevitable price of peace and to recognize that this means the full restoration of rights and territories add up to a very pressing task for the international community, working cooperatively. The principles and resolutions of the international community are being trampled upon in full view of the whole world.

The peace that Syria and the Arab nation aspire to achieve is not a peace based on capitulation and humiliation and the extension of rewards and concessions to Israel at the expense of land, rights, dignity and national existence. We seek a just and comprehensive peace. Any statements to the contrary constitute tampering with the destiny of peoples, mislead international public opinion and protract the time of crisis.

Mr. Islam (Pakistan): The General Assembly has again gathered here to consider the issue of Palestine, as it has annually during the last 50 years. Our collective commitment to a lasting solution to the question of Palestine remains unswerving and consistent. Despite international appeals and efforts, there has been no substantial improvement in the situation, as the illegal Israeli practices in the occupied territories continue unabated, vitiating the peace process initiated six years ago.

For a number of years now, the General Assembly has been stressing the need to scrupulously implement agreements reached between the parties, and calling upon the sponsors and the entire international community to exercise their influence in order to ensure the success of the peace process. Unfortunately, Israel has totally disregarded the calls of the international community.

It is our firm belief that no lasting peace in the Middle East is possible without the achievement of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. The realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory are essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process. Israel must rescind its policies aimed at changing the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories.

The special significance of the Holy City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for the international community in general, and the Islamic Ummah in particular, requires no elaboration. Israeli actions to alter the legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem are deplorable. Israel continues to build new settlements in the south of occupied East Jerusalem, ignoring the appeals of the international community. It has also refused to withdraw its forces from the West Bank, violating the agreement. This is a matter of concern for all of us. These provocative actions have once again shattered the hopes that the peace process would lead to the early exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination through the establishment of an independent homeland.

Pakistan's support for the just struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people is well known. We have consistently stated that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) continue to provide a viable and just framework for a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We believe that Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967, remains central to any comprehensive settlement, and that no lasting peace in the region is possible without the return of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and all occupied territories to the Palestinian people.

It is incumbent upon the international community at this critical juncture to salvage the stalled Middle East peace process by injecting it with a new spirit and momentum. We must encourage the parties, particularly Israel, to faithfully implement all the agreements and accords so as to avoid any derailment of the peace process. It is our hope that the Israeli leadership will concede to the realities on the ground and resolve all pending issues with the Palestinian National Authority. Israel must demonstrate flexibility and a commitment to the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine, ensuring peace, security and stability in the entire region.

The draft resolutions on Palestine before the General Assembly illustrate measures that must be implemented by the Israeli authorities. We hope that Member States will support their adoption without a vote, particularly the new draft resolution [A/52/L.53] entitled "Full participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations".

Mr. Takht-Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Yesterday marked the annual International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this occasion, I would like to reiterate once more the support of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Palestinian people and their just cause.

During the last 50 years the question of Palestine has been prominent on the United Nations agenda. Less than two weeks ago the General Assembly, during its tenth emergency special session, adopted yet another resolution demanding the immediate and full cessation of an illegal activity in the occupied territories — the construction in Jebel Abu Ghneim — and of all other Israeli settlement activities. The Israeli response to this and other calls of the international community, as reflected in numerous United Nations resolutions, has been negative, and Israel continues to disregard these calls with impunity.

The question of Palestine, which lies at the very heart of the Middle East crisis, represents the most vivid and persistent case of disregard for international law and systematic violation of the fundamental human rights of individuals and peoples. The occupation of others' territory; widespread and massive violation of basic human rights, including the right to self-determination; the forceful imposition of the will of one over the entire region through coercion, intimidation and official state terrorism; the disruption of regional security and stability; arms race; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; the rejection of the demands of the international community; and even the violation of commitments willingly undertaken under the so-called peace process constitute the main causes of the Middle East crisis.

The expansion of settlements, in spite of the undertakings of Israel and in contravention of various United Nations resolutions, illustrates the fact that the Israeli regime considers itself above and beyond international law, is not even committed to its own undertakings, and continuously seeks to consolidate its occupation through demographic and geographic changes in the occupied territories, particularly in Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories reiterates that the most disturbing aspect is that a relentless policy of settlement is currently being pursued by Israel regardless of the expression of deep concern by the international community. Other disquieting aspects are the mass withdrawal of identity cards from Palestinians in Jerusalem and the continued imposition of restrictions on the movement of the Palestinian population of the occupied territories, which have created untold hardships.

Furthermore, numerous reports and documents of the United Nations provide ample description of the systematic inhumane practices of the occupying regime. According to these reports, the overall situation of human rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories has deteriorated remarkably and the daily lives of the refugees have been made more difficult as a result of the actions taken by the occupying Power.

The root causes of the problem must be addressed if we are to find a just solution to the problems in the Middle East. The Middle East crisis can be solved only through the full realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, in particular their right to self-determination, the return of refugees and the liberation of all occupied territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan. As our Foreign Minister stated at the general debate of the current session of the General Assembly, the Islamic Republic of Iran seeks peace and stability in the Middle East — a just and lasting peace that would receive regional consensus and cure this chronic crisis once and for all.

Mr. Tshipinare (Botswana): There was a time in the not distant past when one could not think of the question of Palestine without comparing it to the equally vexing questions of apartheid in South Africa and the illegal occupation of Namibia by apartheid South Africa. On the eve of the demise of communism, the bogeyman of racist minority regimes and the cold war, the people of Namibia at long last regained their freedom. The release of Namibia from the clutches of South African apartheid colonialism had a positive effect on the situation in South Africa itself, leading, ineluctably and in quick succession, to the long-sought liberation of South Africa. The liberation of South Africa with the suddenness of a lightning strike infused mankind with the hope and conviction that the sun was finally setting on intractable conflicts.

Unfortunately, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains largely unaffected, in any serious fashion, by the positive cataclysms of the so-called new world order. Palestinians remain a nation without a home, a nation under occupation, a nation whose staple condition is death and misery, a nation of refugees — a nation in desperate search of a collective identity in a State it can proudly call its own.

A just and permanent peace continues to elude the Palestinian people, and the peoples of the Middle East at large, including the Jewish people. The Oslo agreements and the historic Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signed on the lawn of the White House on 13 September 1993, have yet to bring peace and justice to the Palestinian people. The agreements remain partially implemented and consistently violated. Israel has continued to spread illegal settlements in the occupied territories, provoking in response deadly terrorist attacks against innocent Israeli citizens by frustrated Palestinians who see no hope in a peace process which has been in a state of prostration for more than a year.

The world community is one in its conviction that the people of Israel and the Palestinian people have an equal claim to Palestine as their common heritage. The world community contended for years that black and white South Africans enjoyed an equal claim to South Africa as their common homeland. White South Africans have finally accepted that fact. We do not see why the people of Israel cannot embrace their Palestinian brethren and put an end to the needless and unjust denial to the latter of their right to self-determination. This denial has caused untold misery and suffering to Palestinians and the people of Israel alike. And we need no convincing that, so long as the settlements continue to be spread in the occupied Arab territories in defiance of the spirit of Washington and Oslo, so long will the men of violence in the occupied territories feel justified in sowing death and mayhem in Israel. Do not give them such a justification. Do not play into the hands of those who would rather kill than make peace.

The Oslo agreements must be complied with by both parties, Israel and the Palestinians, if they are to survive and deliver peace to Israel and its Arab neighbours. We are not oblivious to the fact that both parties face fanatic opposition to the peace process. In both Israel and the occupied territories, enemies of peace are at work. They are prepared to kill and maim innocent Arabs and Jews to preserve the status quo. No quarter should be given to these fanatics. Pandering to their resistance to change is inimical to the peace process, for they do not want peace.

Each party to the Oslo agreements has a responsibility not only to live up to its share of the Oslo commitments, but also to protect and defend these commitments from and against their predators, the purveyors of terrorist blackmail who have persistently struck deadly blows at every measure of progress in the peace process. There are determined rejectionists in the occupied territories and Israel alike. It is not only in the West Bank and Gaza that the enemies of the peace process in the Middle East are active. They are also very much active on the Israeli side. Therefore, the responsibility for protecting and defending the peace process is one shared in equal measure.

Botswana, let me repeat in conclusion, has consistently insisted that the construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories is a provocation that does no good to the peace process, to put it mildly. These illegal settlements cannot by any stretch of the imagination promote the peace process. On the contrary, they are injurious to the peace process; they have a debilitating effect on it. They make it impossible for the Palestinian leadership to deal effectively with their anti-peace-process fanatics. They are a boon to terrorism. They should be discontinued for the sake of progress in the peace process.

Mr. Sallah (Gambia): I am grateful to be called to contribute to the debate on the question of Palestine, the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, contained in document A/52/35, the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/581, and the letter from the Chairman of the Committee, contained in document A/52/571.

I congratulate the Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, and his colleagues on the admirable manner in which they carried out their mandate and produced a comprehensive report.

Equally commendable are the Secretary-General's continuous efforts for the promotion of peace in the Middle East, as evidenced in his reports.

The adoption of resolution 51/26 of 4 December 1996 by an overwhelming majority was expected to influence the course of events in the Middle East, since it embodied very important principles of international law. The Gambia, like like-minded members of the General Assembly, is in full support of those principles.

The Gambia is among the vast majority of United Nations Member countries which welcomed the following: the signing by the Palestinian authorities and Israel on 15 January 1997 of the Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron, which resulted in the transfer of 80 per cent of the city to the Palestinian authorities; the establishment at the beginning of February this year of bilateral Israeli-Palestinian subcommittees to tackle outstanding issues such as the operation of the Gaza seaport and airport; the opening of the safe passage corridor from the Gaza Strip; and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

These were positive developments to which the sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and other world leaders have contributed immensely. Unfortunately, these gains were nullified by subsequent events, characterized by the ominous statements made by the Israeli Prime Minister and members of his Government and backed by continued military occupation; land confiscation and settlement in the occupied territories; construction of housing units in the settlement of Givat Zeev; demolition of Palestinian houses in the occupied territories; confiscation of identity documents of Palestinians; imposition of closures to drain the Palestinian economy, resulting in the loss of potential income; and systematic change in the physical character and demographic composition of Jerusalem.

The Gambia believes that Israel's illegal acts contravene international law as well as fundamental freedoms and basic human rights in the occupied territories. How long will these acts on the part of Israel continue to be deplored, not only in General Assembly resolutions but also in similar resolutions adopted by the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of the Islamic Conference?

These acts necessarily provoke violent resistance, which some would describe as terrorism and which we all condemn as an evil, committed by whomsoever, wheresoever, and howsoever provoked.

With the demise of apartheid and the end of the cold war, and with our entry into the twilight zone of decolonization, the peace process should be revived in earnest so that the inalienable rights of the Palestinians can be restored in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of exchanging land for peace. The Gambia will continue to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I now call on the observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Ansay (Organization of the Islamic Conference): I am grateful for the privilege of addressing the General Assembly again during its present session.

The Middle East peace process was launched about six years ago with great hopes and expectations. Its main objective was to find a just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine and the related conflict in the Middle East, whose effects have left the Palestinian people in an unspeakably shattered state for almost half a century. Their reward for wanting to live an independent, hard-working and honourable life in their own land, under their own sovereignty and as proud members of the international community of nations, has been death, disablement, destruction of their homes, unemployment and violations of their civil and human rights by the Israeli authorities.

The signing of the Treaty of Peace between Jordan and Israel on 26 October 1994 and the signing of the Interim Agreement in Washington on 28 September 1995 were two of the few positive steps forward, after which, regrettably, the peace process has virtually returned to a stalemate. What has brought about this all-too-familiar scenario is the resumption of yet another series of violations of various elements of the peace agreements by Israel and the blatant and renewed acts of aggression by the Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people, especially following the installation of the present Government in Israel.

Recent meetings in the latest emergency special session of the General Assembly — held on 25 April, 15 July and 13 November 1997, respectively — have addressed the situation and condemned the failure of the Government of Israel to comply with the repeated demands of the Assembly for specific remedial measures. The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/581 of 6 November 1997 sheds light on those Israeli acts of aggression that have thwarted the earlier positive trend and led to a dangerous and lengthy stalemate in the peace process.

The Palestinians, for their part, have naturally — and as is their national right — continued to resist the acts of aggression by the Israeli authorities. At the same time, they have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to shoulder such nation-building responsibilities as have come their way through certain avenues of the peace process, despite all those recurring hurdles that the Israeli authorities have been placing in their way, particularly in their reconstruction and development efforts.

It is gratifying to note that in these efforts the Palestinians are being assisted by concerned and well-meaning members of the international community, comprised of many friendly Governments and several intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The report of the Secretary-General also sheds some light on this aspect, stating:

> "The United Nations will continue to support the peace process, politically and through the provision of economic and social assistance to the Palestinian people facilitated by the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories." [A/52/581, para. 9]

Towards this end, the helpful role being played by the United Nations Special Coordinator and Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Peter Hansen, has not gone unnoticed, and I take this opportunity, through you, Sir, to express our appreciation for his work and that of his colleagues in the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations who have collectively supported the development efforts of the Palestinian people under very difficult conditions. In this connection, we fully share the view of the Secretary-General that UNRWA should

> "be put on a sound financial footing so that the downgrading in its services to the Palestinian refugees can be avoided". [ibid.]

Through you, Sir, we would like to convey to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA the assurances of our continued support and cooperation in the important tasks his Agency is undertaking in Palestine despite reduced resources and in the face of Israel's failure to cooperate. In fact, the much-needed international humanitarian and technical assistance to the Palestinian people also remains hindered by the apparent non-cooperative attitude of the Israeli authorities, which still continue to enforce upon the population of today's Palestine the same restrictive bureaucratic formalities that they had designed to deal with the people living under their military occupation in previous years.

In my two successive addresses before the General Assembly last year and the year before, I repeatedly stated that experiences of this nature were, at best, at variance with and, at worst, in gross violation of the spirit of compromise and cooperation which must now characterize all current and future dealings among the Palestinian and Israeli authorities in the implementation of the peace agreements. This has become all the more important now for establishing the credibility and practicability of the peace accords already concluded and for generating confidence in the negotiations for future accords.

We in the OIC would have liked to believe that the difficulties I have just cited are perhaps only a neglected carry-over of the way the Palestinians were being dealt with before, rather than a reflection of present-day official Israeli policies concerning the implementation of the peace accords. But, regrettably, the grim realities speak for themselves. The signal is again, therefore, that there is an urgent need for a change and that the time for that change is now. It will bring peace and the immeasurable benefits of peace for the peoples of both Palestine and Israel if the peace accords are implemented by Israel with the same sincerity and vigour as is being shown by the Palestinians today.

At this stage I should like to pay tribute to His Excellency Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his astute and dynamic leadership of the work of the Committee, and to recall the close and fruitful cooperation between the Committee and the OIC in support of the peace process in Palestine. An example of this cooperation would be the proposed conference on Palestinian rights scheduled to be held in Brussels in February 1998 under the joint auspices of the United Nations, the OIC and the League of Arab States.

I should now like briefly to report on the highlights of the OIC annual coordination meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held in New York on 2 October 1997, which reaffirmed the OIC's support for the peace process in the Middle East. Among other things, it also reaffirmed its support and backing of the positions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in its negotiations with Israel for establishing its authority in the Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and called on the international community to compel Israel to halt colonization activities and any measures aimed at changing the political, geographical or demographic status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif; to adhere to the implementation of all agreements signed with the PLO; and to resume negotiations on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks from the point at which they were suspended, and in accordance with the foundations of the peace process.

The meeting also reaffirmed that the accreditation of Israel's delegation to the General Assembly does not apply to the Arab and Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and called for the Palestinian participation in the United Nations to be consistent with the new realities, especially following the establishment of the Palestine National Authority in the Palestinian territories.

I take this opportunity to affirm the OIC's full support for the proposal to extend to Palestine the status and facilities available to the States Member of the United Nations that enable them to play their full and effective role in the functioning of the United Nations, including the placement of the Palestine delegation among the States Members of the United Nations in the General Assembly Hall.

Yesterday morning we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People with a traditional meeting to mark the occasion here at the United Nations. A message from my Secretary-General was among those of the heads of State and of international organizations that were received from all over the world. It was a message of peace, a call for reason and an appeal for the extension of every support to the Palestinian people to help alleviate the suffering inflicted on them by many years of occupation, repression and denial of the exercise of their national human rights. It is now up to the international community — the Member States represented in this body — to react and respond in the manner that the time and hour demand.

In conclusion, I should like to state that in the ongoing peace process lies the opportunity for uniting efforts for the attainment of peace, tranquillity and progress for Palestine, Israel and all other countries in the Middle East and beyond, for they all stand to gain immeasurably from the long-awaited positive turn of events in that troubled region. It behooves the membership of this great world Organization to ensure that in the very limited time of the twentieth century that still remains, this opportunity is not lost.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I wish to inform members that action will be taken on draft resolutions A/52/L.49 through L.53 on Wednesday, 3 December, in the afternoon.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.

United Nations

A/52/PV.60

General Assembly

Fifty-second Session

Official Records

60th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 3 December 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 16

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections

(d) Election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

Note by the Secretary-General (A/52/695)

The President: I invite members to turn their attention to the note by the Secretary-General in document A/52/695, dealing with the election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

In his note the Secretary-General informs the Assembly that he wishes to nominate Mr. Klaus Töpfer to be Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a four-year term beginning on 1 January 1998. However, I have been advised by the Secretary-General that the effective date for the beginning of his term of office should be adjusted to 1 February 1998.

Accordingly, may I take it that the General Assembly wishes to elect Mr. Klaus Töpfer Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme for a four-year term beginning on 1 February 1998?

It was so decided.

Mr. Mahugu (Kenya): Allow me, on my own behalf and on that of my Government, to extend our warm congratulations to Mr. Klaus Töpfer on his election as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Mr. Töpfer is well known to this Assembly. We recall the skilful manner with which he handled his portfolio as Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development. This, coupled with his experience in the areas of government and academia, gives us confidence that he brings to UNEP a wealth of experience for championing the global environmental cause.

We are all aware that poverty is both a cause and an effect of environmental degradation. As noted during the special session, much still remains to be done in fulfilment of the Earth Summit goals, specifically due to lack of adequate and predictable financial resources and environmentally sound technology transfer.

Mr. Töpfer assumes the stewardship of UNEP at a time when the United Nations reform process is being undertaken. These reforms, among other things, are geared towards streamlining the United Nations system, with its funds and programmes being revitalized and strengthened to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. We reiterate the pivotal role of UNEP as the principal body in the field of the environment. It is expected that during the ongoing United Nations reforms, this role will be strengthened.

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

The task ahead of Mr. Töpfer is not an easy one. We are, however, confident that we will be able to measure up to his responsibilities by ensuring the effective and efficient discharge of his duties. Among the major problems that UNEP has continued to face over the years are lack of funding, decentralization of environment-related secretariats and financial and management bottlenecks. My country believes that Mr. Töpfer's credibility, as well as his commitment to global environmental issues, should be complemented with undivided support from both the developed and the developing countries. We should accord him all the necessary resources, without which his commitment will not bear fruit.

He will, among other things, require adequate, stable and predictable funding to enable him effectively to address the outstanding environmental problems.

Kenya, on its part, will continue to provide the necessary support, as well as an enabling environment, for the Executive Director to perform his functions to the best of his abilities. We are fully committed to continue supporting the United Nations Environment Programme at UNEP headquarters at Nairobi and we should like to know how best the Executive Director would like to be assisted. We say: "Welcome to Kenya, Mr. Executive Director".

Mr. Wahab (Pakistan): On behalf of Ambassador Ahmad Kamal, the Permanent Representative of Pakistan, I have the honour to read out this statement:

> "I would like to congratulate Mr. Klaus Töpfer on his unanimous election to the post of Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It is indeed a recognition of Mr. Töpfer's significant contribution in the field of environmental protection. We also consider that the election of Mr. Töpfer is an acknowledgement of the role that Germany has played in promoting the goal of environmental protection within the United Nations framework.
>
> "The Pakistan delegation would also like to express its sincere appreciation for the work of the outgoing Executive Director, Ms. Elizabeth Dowdeswell.
>
> "Pakistan has actively participated in all the United Nations activities relating to environmental issues. At the Rio Conference, it had the honour to represent the Group of 77 and China. We attach great importance to the implementation of Agenda 21. We believe that the United Nations Environment Programme can play a significant role in realizing the objectives of the Agenda.
>
> "I would also like to recall the declaration adopted by the Ministers of the Group of 77 and China last September. They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening UNEP as the leading global environmental organization and urged developed countries to support UNEP with adequate and predictable financial resources. The Ministers expressed their resolve not to countenance any measure that would weaken UNEP in any form.
>
> "The developing countries would like to play their due role in strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme. We hope that, in the appointment of the Deputy Executive Director of the Programme, the principle of fair geographic representation will be observed."

The President: We have thus concluded our consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 16.

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/52/467 and A/52/581)

Draft resolutions (A/52/L.54, A/52/L.55 and A/52/L.62)

Amendments (A/52/L.63)

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour the take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

Early in this decade, the Madrid Conference and the Oslo process opened the way to mutual recognition between Israel and its neighbours and to a negotiated peace in the whole region. The people of the Middle East could finally envisage the possibility of being able to live in peace, security, mutual respect and dignity on the lands which they share.

Unfortunately, the tremendous hope that arose at that time has been dashed in recent months and one might fear that the peace process has thus been jeopardized. The absence of progress in the negotiations, the lack of implementation of the agreements reached, and the upsurge of acts of violence against civilian populations have compromised the confidence which the people of the region had in the peace process and provoked an acute feeling of frustration among them.

For too many people in the region, the daily reality remains one of poverty, insecurity and despair. Last October, following the efforts of the sponsors of the peace process, the parties met again after a long interruption of the talks. We hope that the parties may thus progressively restore the mutual confidence and resume the negotiations in a spirit of perseverance and cooperation.

For its part, the European Union calls upon the parties to honour the obligations and agreements which they have contracted in the framework of the Madrid and Oslo process, fully to implement the Israeli-Palestinian agreements already concluded and to reject any unilateral initiative that could delay or hinder the peace process.

In this context, we reiterate our opposition to the development of settlements in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, as well as our attachment to cooperation in the field of security and in the fight against terrorism. The European Union reaffirms its position on the status of Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is subject to the principles set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which affirms in particular the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

The European Union considers that it is also necessary to advance on the other tracks of the peace process in order to break the current deadlock and to create a climate of confidence among all the parties. Indeed, the stagnation of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the process threatens everyone's security.

The European Union will therefore continue to support the resumption of the negotiations between Israel and Syria and the opening of negotiations between Israel and Lebanon that fully respect the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of this country. We have repeatedly called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon and have advocated cooperation with the United Nations forces present there.

We also wish to confirm our support for the multilateral track of the peace process, which will have to play an important role in order to complete and to promote the bilateral negotiations. In this context, the European Union will take an active part in the works of the regional working group for economic development and of other multilateral groups.

The European Union will continue to see to it that the task of the peace-builders is brought to fruition, through the relations of friendship and trust which it maintains with the various parties and by intensifying its engagement on the diplomatic level, including through its Special Envoy for the peace process in the Middle East. In particular, we intend to facilitate the resumption of the talks by contributing to the adoption of a code of good conduct between the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as to the adoption of confidence measures.

We consider that the economic and social progress in the region, as well as the substantial improvement of the plight of the population, constitute an essential part of the peace process. The European Union has been the main donor to the Palestinian population for several years.

The European Union is convinced that no alternative exists to the peace process in the Middle East. The commitments which were made in Madrid and Oslo — which must be fully implemented — constitute an historic opportunity to restore a just and lasting peace to a region which has been deprived of it for such a long time.

The foundations upon which this peace will be built are well known and were established in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978): the right of all States and peoples of the region to live in peace within safe and recognized borders, the respect for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to decide their own future, the exchange of land for peace, the non-acceptable character of the annexation of territory by force, the respect for human rights, the rejection of terrorism in all its forms, and good-neighbourly relations. To this is added the respect of the existing agreements and the rejection of any counterproductive initiative.

For its part, the European Union will continue its efforts to convince the parties to relaunch a constructive dialogue in order to achieve the just, lasting and comprehensive peace to which we all aspire.

Mr. Gold (Israel): Discussion about the situation in the Middle East requires a broad analysis of the major forces affecting the principal developments across the region. It also requires a careful reading of the specific issues that are addressed under this item. It is critically important to recall that the current peace process had its genesis in a unique confluence of events and trends which occurred in 1991.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc in Eastern Europe put an end to global super-Power competition. The Arab-Israeli conflict could finally be apprehended as a major regional issue devoid of high-stakes dividends for the great Powers. True, this did not diminish the complexities of the conflict within its regional setting. Nevertheless, a solution to the conflict was no longer deemed a zero-sum game by nations which were not in the region but which had their own agendas.

Iraq, which had invaded and annexed Kuwait, had just been defeated by a multinational coalition of forces. Iraqi aggression had confirmed in fact what most had known in theory — namely, that the true threat to many Arab States lay not in Israel but in militarily strong and anti-status-quo regimes far closer to their own borders, which still accept the use of force as a legitimate instrument to affect their international positions.

Iran was still recovering from its eight-year war with Iraq and had not begun to fully assert itself as a regional Power.

Today this situation has changed to a great degree. We once again find that not all of the world's Powers are in agreement regarding the Middle East. The global consensus against the most formidable anti-status-quo Powers has been shaken. The world Powers are engaged in a mixture of competition and cooperation that regional actors hope to manipulate.

Iran now engages in forcefully exporting its own brand of radicalism. Israel has witnessed its effects in the continuous flow of arms to Hezbollah in the Lebanese Bekaa, from where they are fired into northern Israel. But we are not alone. Branches of Hezbollah have been springing up across the region, many of which train in Iran itself. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have also felt the effects of the long arm of Iranian-sponsored subversion.

There are those who claim that the current regime in Tehran is more moderate and more practical than its predecessor. Would this be the case, then many in our region, and not only in Israel, would look forward to greater tranquillity. However, wishing something to be does not make it so; it is incumbent upon us to see the world as it is and not only as we would like it to be.

For example, on 28 September of this year, the current Iranian Foreign Minister granted an interview to the *Los Angeles Times*. In response to a question regarding the circumstances under which Iran might deign to recognize Israel, he responded: "We don't recognize Israel." When pressed further by his interviewer, he replied: "I can't imagine Iran could recognize Israel as a country."

Regarding any peace with Israel, the official Iranian news agency carried a report on 28 September 1997 which stated, *inter alia*:

> "Today almost all regional countries, with the exception of a few, have realized the truth of what the late Imam Khomeini meant when he said that, 'Israel is a cancer on the body of the Muslim Ummah and it must be eradicated.'"

These are the winds of change that have been identified as emanating from Tehran. Iran's total rejection of Israel and its revolutionary adventurism make its military buildup so troubling. The marriage between its readiness to engage in regional activism and its quest for weapons of strategic reach should be a source of concern for all States interested in the stability and security of the Middle East as a whole.

Yet, in spite of these voices, which find their echoes in the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as well as in the Lebanese Hezbollah, Israel is determined to move forward with the peace process. Moreover, it is important to emphasize in this context the words of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who repeatedly stated that despite our conflict with extremist groups, Israel rejects the notion that Islam has replaced Communism as the new enemy of the West. Prime Minister Netanyahu stated this firm view in Hebrew before the Israeli Knesset and in English before a joint session of the United States Congress in 1996.

We have begun working with the Palestinians on joint committees with the goal to implement the Interim Agreement. We have proposed the second of three further redeployments. Foreign Minister Levy and Mr. Abu Mazen met just yesterday in order to explore ways to reinvigorate the peace process. All this will come to nought, however, if the voices of reason are overpowered by fanaticism and violence. We expect the Palestinian Authority to make the utmost effort to combat terrorism. Security cooperation is not a reward which Israel expects; it is a necessary condition for progress.

Similarly, the peace process still holds out the promise of regional economic cooperation which can benefit all who take part. Yet this regional cooperation is not a prize which can be awarded to or withheld from Israel. Regional cooperation benefits all who participate. Those who do so ensure economic and social progress for their people. This is a win-win issue, and Governments which have the best interests of their people at heart know this.

Governments in the Middle East have to ask themselves how they want our region to appear 20 years from now. Do they want rapid economic growth and entry into the high-tech information age to be confined to other regions? Do they want investors to fly from Europe to the Asian economic tigers while skipping over a Middle East still viewed as unstable, turbulent and dangerous? The peoples of the Middle East deserve their fair share of the future world economy; they do not deserve to be condemned to being only a perpetual market for massive weapons sales.

Once again, among the draft resolutions which have been proposed is one which purports to deal with the Golan Heights. This draft resolution prejudges issues which are to be negotiated between the parties and preordains a solution which obviates the need for any discussion between Israel and Syria. As such, this draft resolution is not only irrelevant but actually harms the cause of peace. Israel has its own perspective, but it is ready to listen to the Syrian view, with no prior conditions.

The Golan Heights are a vital security interest of the State of Israel. For 19 years, from 1948 until 1967, villages and kibbutzim in the Galilee were regularly bombarded from Syrian artillery positions on the Golan. Repeated Syrian efforts were made to divert the sources of the Jordan River in the Golan Heights. In 1973 Syria arrayed 1,400 tanks against 177 Israeli tanks as part of its surprise attack, which was halted only at the cost of a grave loss of human lives. To this day Syria continues to have an enormous quantitative advantage over Israel in standing ground formations. It continues to deploy the vast majority of its ground forces near its frontiers with Israel, even though that border is Syria's shortest. That reality must be addressed.

The struggle between Syria's territorial claims and Israel's legitimate security concerns and interests must be resolved, creatively, at the negotiating table. I call on Syria, as have both Israel's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister before me, to return to the negotiating table and engage Israel in good faith. Such a step, more than any resolution adopted in this Hall, will ensure that peace between us will become a reality.

Under the agenda item entitled, "The situation in the Middle East", a yearly resolution on Jerusalem is offered. For the people of Israel, Jerusalem is the centre of our aspirations. It is where our particularism as a people and our universalism to the world meet. For under our control, Jerusalem is open to all faiths. The Jewish people were repeatedly banned from Jerusalem by others but always returned, from the time of the Roman Emperor Hadrian to the present century. Already a Jewish majority in Jerusalem was re-established in 1864, in the period of the Ottoman Empire, before the establishment of the present-day state system in the Middle East. The people of Israel are not strangers or newcomers to Jerusalem; but when they were denied access to Jerusalem, the world was silent. Now that it is open and vibrant, international political forces are making their voices heard. Jerusalem will remain the unified capital of Israel and will thus serve as an open centre to all faiths of the world, to practice in complete freedom with no fear.

Forces that seek to polarize and destabilize the Middle East are more active in 1997 than they were in 1991, when the peace process was launched. But these larger forces are generally missed in today's discussion. The focal point of all discussion tends to be Israel. This is a problem not just for Israel but for the entire world. Sixty years ago the main threat to international security came from the continent of Europe. Today these threats come from the Middle East. Unless they are identified and addressed, they will undermine the well-being of nations across the globe.

It is the free will of the people of Israel to be on the side of peace and progress in Middle East. No nation or organization compels Israel to make peace, despite the dangers in our region.

It was Israel's prophets who bequeathed to mankind a vision of universal peace, and therefore I close with the words of Isaiah, so familiar to many of us, that:

(spoke in Hebrew)

> "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" [*The Bible*, Isaiah 2:4].

Mr. Donokusumo (Indonesia): The Assembly is considering the situation in the Middle East at a time when the peace process is mired in a serious crisis and at an impasse. The vision of a region finally at peace, with justice and with the secure and stable future promised by the important achievements of the past few years, is being unravelled. The undeniable reality is that the situation in the Middle East today continues to be fraught with tension and poses a threat to international peace and security, despite decades of international attention.

The persistence of this state of affairs can be ascribed wholly to the untenable policies and actions relentlessly pursued by the Government of Israel in contradiction with the principles governing the peace process as they relate to the three tracks of negotiations between Israel on the one hand and Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians on the other.

Over the past year, time and again the General Assembly has turned its attention to the question of Palestine as the core issue of the situation in the Middle East. On 13 November 1997, the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly once again overwhelmingly adopted a resolution condemning the failure of the Government of Israel to cease the building of a new settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of East Jerusalem. And only a few days ago the Assembly extensively considered the question of Palestine and expressed its views in no uncertain terms on the Government of Israel's continued evasion of the commitments and agreements reached as well as its blatant unilateral measures to impose a *fait accompli* in the occupied Palestinian territory. These unconscionable policies and practices of the Government of Israel have led to mounting frustration and despair among the Palestinian people and have resulted in the present setback to the peace process.

The Government of Israel has displayed the same manifest lack of commitment to the peace process with respect to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the negotiations. Thus, the sovereign territory of Lebanon remains under the illegal military occupation of Israel and subject to incessant military operations, in violation of the fundamental principles of international law. It is essential that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon be restored and respected. For this, Israel must immediately withdraw to the internationally recognized boundaries and abandon its continuing pursuit of the logic of war.

With regard to the Israeli-Syrian track of negotiations, Indonesia cannot accept the attempts by the Government of Israel to reinterpret and indeed to step back from the principle of land for peace underlying these negotiations. It is our hope that negotiations between Israel and Syria will resume, leading to full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan. These negotiations should resume from the point at which they were halted, and the two parties should commit themselves to what has already been achieved.

My delegation need hardly reiterate its longstanding position that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict which has for so long engulfed the Middle East necessarily entails the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). For peace to flourish, there should be total Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since 1967, the exercise by the Palestinian people of their legitimate right to self-determination and sovereign independence, and respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders. And for peace to be truly meaningful it must also be translated into concrete improvements in the living conditions of the long-suffering Palestinian people; hence, there is an urgent need for economic, financial and technical assistance by the international community. In this regard, the worsening of the Palestinian economy due to the policies pursued by the Government of Israel, including the repeated closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which constitute a form of collective punishment of the Palestinian people, is indeed a source of profound concern.

Prolonged delay in seeking a durable solution to the endemic Middle East conflict would entail incalculable consequences. The Government of Israel should therefore implement the agreements which have been painstakingly reached, and not backtrack from the agreed principles underlying the peace process. Today, the international community has the opportunity once again to express its unequivocal support for the peace process, for it is the only realistic option for the attainment of durable peace and stability in the Middle East and must therefore be pursued vigorously and with fortitude by all parties concerned. The alternative would see the Middle East region once again plunged into a vicious cycle of violence and chaos.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: The situation in the Middle East is among the most important of international questions. It galvanizes the attention of the States Members of the United Nations because of the region's importance with respect to the establishment of international peace and security. For many years the peoples of the Middle East have suffered the ravages of war, instability and mistrust, which has dissipated efforts towards development and peace and has replaced them with a race to build up military arsenals and to prepare for a succession of wars. This has destroyed all the elements of confidence and security among the peoples of the region. Peace has become a dream, not only for those peoples, but for all the world's peoples.

Mr. Zacharikis (Greece), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The peoples of the Middle East are today deeply concerned at the deterioration of the Middle East peace process that began at Madrid in 1991. Members have followed along with us the regrettable paralysis of that process, the spiralling despair and the increased tension in the region that have come about through mutual recriminations and threats. All of this results from precepts that the Government of Israel has put forward for the terms of reference of the peace process.

Kuwait repeatedly welcomed the launching of the peace process. It also welcomed the bilateral agreements signed, in the framework of the peace process, between 1993 and 1995 by the Palestinian Authority and Israel, as well as the 1994 bilateral agreement between the Governments of Jordan and of Israel. Kuwait has always affirmed the importance of progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with a view to a solution guaranteeing the rights of all the peoples of the region and based on the recognized pillars of the peace process: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace.

Today Kuwait is gravely concerned at the deterioration and regression of the peace process, especially since the Israeli Government's adoption of positions that run counter to the foundations of the peace process laid at Madrid. We in Kuwait understand well the gravity of the Israeli Government's continued pursuit of its current practices, which are a stumbling block to progress in the peace process and for the attainment of its objectives in the Middle East. The Government of Israel has abandoned the norms and principles of the Madrid conference and has replaced them with extraneous factors that contravene the rules unanimously accepted by the international community as a framework for the peace process.

Moreover, Israel has not kept its commitment to implement the bilateral agreements signed with the Palestinian Authority and has not withdrawn from the occupied Palestinian territories, as called for under those agreements. Israel, the occupying Power, continues its old policies, which violate international law and international norms, including the imposition of a policy of closure and of the collective punishment of the Palestinian people, and the ongoing annexation and Judaization of Arab Jerusalem with a view to changing the demographic character of the Holy City — the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This year we have seen Israel's intransigent refusal to respond to the will of the international community that it put an end to its settlement policies in East Jerusalem, in particular its persistence in the establishment of the Jebel Abu Ghneim settlement south of East Jerusalem, a matter on which the General Assembly has adopted four resolutions.

Here we reaffirm our support for the convening of a meeting of High Contracting Parties of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to consider the application of the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, as soon as possible. We call on the two co-sponsors of the peace process to make a greater effort to revive the peace process with a view to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

In that context, we welcome the recent efforts of the Secretary of State of the United States, Mrs. Madeleine Albright, to move the negotiations between the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli Government towards progress. We pay tribute also to the endeavours of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in this regard.

Israel must recognize that the peace process is an indivisible whole that cannot be separated into parts. Kuwait thus emphasizes the importance of Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan, which has been occupied since 1967. This is essential for the success of the Middle East peace process. Israeli withdrawal from the Golan is also a litmus test for Israel's good faith and its desire to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. The negotiating process must be carried out within the framework of the peace process, in good faith, with respect for the rights of others, and with mutual trust. In that connection, we support Syria's call for the resumption of the negotiations at the point at which they were interrupted.

Kuwait also supports Lebanon's position that Israel must implement all provisions of Security Council 425 (1978), withdraw unconditionally from Lebanese territory, which Israel now occupies, and work towards ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. Kuwait will always stand by its brethren, the Government and the people of Lebanon, in their call for unconditional Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon to enable the Lebanese people to achieve their aspiration to live along with other peoples in the region in tranquillity and stability. The time has come for Lebanon to be given a genuine opportunity to resume its well known role in consolidating the foundations of comprehensive development and progress in the region.

The Arab peoples have now no other strategic choice except just, lasting and comprehensive peace. But the Israeli Government continues to make every effort to frustrate our peoples and to destroy their hopes for the attainment of real peace. It is time for Israel to recognize that if it wishes to live in stability, it must observe the rights of others, commit itself to the concluded agreements, evince goodwill, shun provocation and deal with questions in an enlightened manner that does not harm principal parties to the peace equation in the Middle East.

Finally, I would like to stress Kuwait's firm position in support of the peace process in the region. This emanates from our belief that peace is a worthy objective that deserves our patience because of its positive effects on the peoples of the region, who yearn for permanent and genuine peace, which will bring with it dividends of development, prosperity and stability.

Mr. Çelem (Turkey): Turkey considers the Middle East peace process, initiated in the recent past, as the single most important positive development in the fragile political environment of that region. We have placed much hope in it for ensuring an increasingly peaceful and prosperous future for the entire Middle East. For that same reason, today we feel most frustrated by the unexpected turn of events that has led to a rupture in the peace process and to the present unacceptable situation.

My delegation stated from this very rostrum exactly one year ago that unfulfilled obligations, terrorism and economic deprivation are the three main obstacles standing in the way of the peace process. In the meantime, nothing has changed.

The grave and deteriorating situation in the Middle East has been the subject during the past year of a series of Security Council meetings and of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. It is regrettable that, despite the strong appeals of the international community and the weight of the resolutions adopted, a satisfactory and unambiguous breakthrough has not yet been achieved.

Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories, in defiance of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, continue to hold the peace process hostage. Over the past few months my Government has urged the Israeli Government to honour its commitments by ending the construction of new settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. The Palestinians and the Israelis, recognizing that they are partners in this process, have to do their utmost to rebuild mutual trust and confidence.

In the light of the long and dramatic history of the Middle East question, we are all too aware that this will not come easily. It will require far-sightedness and wisdom on the part of the leaders, and goodwill and sacrifice on the part of the peoples. In this respect, we are following with great interest and hope the latest direct contacts between the parties and the new efforts to rekindle the peace process.

The peace process has advanced until now through bilateral negotiations. It may also be correct to assume that bilateral negotiations will again prove to be the only peaceful way out of the present crisis. However, Israel should recognize that its partner in the peace process cannot go on negotiating while at the same time observing Israeli construction activities on the very land that is the principal object of the negotiations. For these negotiations to be conducted in a favourable atmosphere and in good faith, all settlement activities in the occupied territories, starting first and foremost the Jebel Abu Ghneim project, should cease. All the obligations entered into by the two sides must be respected. Only then will the peace process be able to move along the path laid out for it.

At the same time, no one should doubt that terrorism is a fundamental threat to peace. We have seen how it is deliberately used to sabotage peace efforts. Enemies of peace in our region do not hesitate to engage in violence and acts of terror in order to impede reconciliation and to disrupt stability. We emphasize once again the absolute necessity that countries lending support to terrorism immediately abandon this line. We earnestly urge such countries to refrain from using this scourge of our times as a means of advancing their interests. The policy of terrorism is built upon the blood and flesh of innocent people. Thus, we expect all countries to do everything in their power at the bilateral, regional and international levels to support and contribute to the struggle against terrorism. Turkey is ready to participate in enhanced cooperation in combating terrorism.

Another issue of concern for us is the economic and social situation in the region. Improving living conditions for the Palestinian people, both within and outside the occupied territories, remains another significant goal. Deprivation and poverty are grave problems that have to be surmounted before a favourable atmosphere can be created in which the peace process can flourish. In this regard, closure policies are particularly harmful. Only when a certain level of economic stability and social welfare is achieved will the spirit of cooperation replace existing feelings of frustration and hostility. In the present circumstances, tangible support of the international community in the form of economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people is of paramount importance.

As a country of the region, Turkey sincerely desires and strongly supports a peaceful, durable and mutually accepted settlement of the Middle East problem. I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate Turkey's commitment to helping the peace process in every way possible and to contributing to the efforts aimed at achieving reconciliation in the region. In this regard, my country has always supported the just cause of the Palestinian people, and we are ready to contribute to all initiatives for a settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

I would also like to reiterate my Government's position on the situation in Lebanon. We attach great importance to the preservation of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of that country. We stress the significance of the full and strict implementation of the Taif Agreement by all parties concerned, and we also underline again the need for full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). A lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be based only upon the rights of all States in the region, including Israel, to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders.

We are obviously at a turning point in the history of the Middle East. A great challenge — to heal wounds, achieve reconciliation and build a secure and prosperous future for Palestinians, Israelis and peoples of the region beyond — lies ahead. At the same time, the deep-rooted fears, lack of mutual confidence and real threats to the peace process hover in the background. We believe it is still possible for the leaders, for the peoples and for the countries of the region to make the right choices and to meet this challenge.

My Government appeals once again to all parties concerned to make every effort to give new impetus to the peace process and to move it forward towards its goal.

Mrs. Basmillah (Brunei Darussalam): My delegation is pleased to join others in the debate on this important agenda item. We have long been convinced that there will be no peace in the Middle East without the return of the occupied territories — the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. The international community has emphasized time and again that the Middle East crisis can be solved only through the full realization of the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Initially, we were pleased to see the Middle East peace process move forward positively. Now we are again concerned. Events this year have caused a tremendous setback in the momentum of the peace process. Israel has not been forthcoming in implementing the peace agreements signed in Madrid in 1991 and in Oslo in 1993. The decision by Israel to establish and expand existing Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories is against the spirit of those agreements. It has also had a serious effect on the cultural characteristics and demographic composition of the areas concerned, including East Jerusalem.

These developments and their damaging effects on the trust of the people of Palestine and the Middle East region is most disturbing. Mutual trust is vital for peaceful coexistence. It is in this context that we would like to reiterate our wish to see Israel contribute positively towards the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem. We would also like to see the Israelis comply fully with the aforementioned agreements and with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The right of Palestinians to their homeland should continue to be upheld, and their sufferings should be ended.

There is no alternative but to proceed with the peace process. It is most essential that repeated delays not be allowed. The accords must be fully implemented. We therefore call upon the international community to provide renewed impetus and encourage progress.

We appreciate the efforts of all the interested countries that have been active in helping the process. I assure the Assembly that Brunei Darussalam will continue to support efforts which contribute to achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East. By this we mean real progress through negotiated settlement.

Mr. Bohaievs'ky (Ukraine): For the past 50 years the United Nations and the world community have undertaken many efforts to resolve various aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has turned out to be the most intricate and multifaceted one in post-Second World War history. Numerous international attempts to invigorate the Middle East peace process at its different stages have gone through achievements and failures, victories and defeats. However, there has always been hope for something better.

In our view, the peace process is now at its most critical juncture in several years. The continuous deterioration of the situation related to the Palestinian question — the key problem in the Arab-Israeli conflict — has reached bottom. In the course of this year we have witnessed with deep concern the multiplied cycles of violence, suicide bombings and terrorist attacks, which have taken away hundreds of innocent lives. We do not want such developments to go on and on.

A sage of the past once said, rightly, that after falling to the bottom of the abyss one has nothing else to do but rise and climb up again. Likewise, the parties to the Middle East conflict must overcome the current crisis of animosity and try to reach a long-awaited breakthrough. This is achievable only by honouring the terms of the accords signed at the Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo agreements, and should be done in full accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Any deviation by the parties from their previous commitments may lead to unpredictable consequences, which are not desirable.

Our delegation is of the view that closer cooperation between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority in the field of combating terrorism, while implementing the Oslo and the Hebron agreements, would help them proceed to final status talks. We also hope that a mutually acceptable solution to the challenging and very painful problem of the future of the Holy City of Jerusalem will be finally reached by the parties.

In our view, a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East will remain elusive unless it is supported by adequate measures in the field of disarmament, in particular the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction accumulated in the region. That is why every year the delegation of Ukraine joins the consensus in the First Committee on the resolution on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East.

Israeli-Jordanian relations constitute an important component of the Middle East peace process. In this connection, Ukraine welcomed the signing by the two countries of the Treaty of Peace in 1994, which paved the way for establishing a ceasefire, the mutually agreed international borders, full diplomatic relations, economic cooperation and cooperation in combating terrorism and the special role of Jordan in looking after the Muslim relics in Jerusalem. The normalization of relations between these two countries may serve as an encouraging example for other countries in the region in finding the common language of peace.

The Israeli-Syrian and the Israeli-Lebanese negotiating tracks are also indispensable links in a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East problem. We believe that the problem of the Syrian Golan, which this year marked its sombre thirtieth anniversary, will be settled at the peace talks of the parties, resumed from the point they reached earlier as a result of the policy of compromise.

We cannot be indifferent to the current state of Israeli-Lebanese relations; neither can we hide our concern about the critical humanitarian situation in the south of Lebanon. In this regard, the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in providing humanitarian assistance to the suffering civilian population, as well as in undertaking measures for its protection, cannot he overestimated. In this context, I would like to confirm the readiness of Ukraine to contribute personnel and, in particular, a military hospital, to the UNIFIL operation.

Taking into account the fragility of the peace process, we are certain that the United Nations and the international community as a whole should effectively prevent any deterioration of the situation in the region. Therefore, Ukraine is deeply gratified by reports about an easing of the tensions caused by the recent crisis between the Iraqi leadership and the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM).

In this regard, we commend the substantial and energetic efforts of the sponsors of the process to defuse the potential conflict. Ukraine firmly believes that only unconditional implementation by Iraq of all relevant Security Council resolutions could eventually lead to the lifting of the current United Nations sanctions against that country.

However, the international community should not disregard the critical humanitarian situation in Iraq which resulted from the imposition of sanctions. In this respect, we welcome the recent recommendations made by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the oil-for-food programme, which envisage permitting Iraq to increase its oil sales and to get additional humanitarian goods. Needless to say, these humanitarian flows should be delivered to people in need under United Nations monitoring.

In conclusion, it is our sincere hope that at the close of this century the long-standing Middle East problem will eventually find a peaceful solution.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) *(interpretation from French):* For 50 years now the crisis in the Middle East has been a central concern for the international community and has been on the agendas of the General Assembly and of the Security Council. These bodies have adopted many resolutions on the subject, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 497 (1981) which were to have provided a basis and a framework for a permanent solution to the problems of the region.

Notwithstanding these decisions taken by the international community and the many efforts made, the situation is still very precarious in that part of the world.

The Madrid Conference, held in October 1991, brought about for the first time in the history of the region a major easing of the situation by opening the way to direct negotiations between Arabs and Israelis.

At that time, we the international community, had legitimate hopes for the advent of a true era of peace in the Middle East.

We rightly thought that that ancient land of civilizations and convergence, the cradle of revealed religions that had always taught tolerance, would rediscover its age-old vocation of stability, coexistence and cooperative partnership.

We rightly thought that the aspirations of the people of Palestine for self-determination and the building of their national State could finally be realized.

We rightly believed that the question of Jerusalem, Al-Quds al-Sharif, the city of peace and coexistence, would be resolved.

We rightly believed that the Palestinian refugees would be able to return to their villages and towns in honour or to be compensated for the loss of their property.

And, finally, we rightly thought that Israel within its secure, internationally recognized borders, would start to withdraw its troops from the occupied territories of southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan to enter, together with its Arab neighbours, an era of secure coexistence in beneficial partnership.

For all those reasons, we unanimously encouraged, supported and framed the peace process enshrined in the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The signing of the Treaty of Peace between Israel and Jordan and the successful holding of regional economic conferences in Rabat, Cairo, Amman and Doha reinforced the expectations of the international community.

With the significant progress made in recent years on the road to peace, we had reason to believe and to hope that the Middle East could finally enter, towards the end of this century, an era of peace and stability through the reconciliation of the hearts and minds of the peoples of the region.

However, this rendezvous with history seems to have been missed when one examines at the current situation on the ground and the fragility of the peace process.

Israel's refusal, the obstacles it creates in order not to honour its commitments under the peace agreements, its illegal policies of settling Arab lands of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, the frequent closures of the territories, the stifling of the Palestinian economy, the mistreatment of the population and the provocative actions by armed settlers against innocent civilians have heightened frustrations and bred distrust. This situation of tension is harmful to the progress of the peace process. This situation ultimately will prove the enemies of peace right.

The latest initiative to Judaize East Jerusalem with the building of a new Jewish settlement on Arab land in Jebel Abu Ghneim, in a highly symbolic place, is a deliberate provocation in the light of the relevant resolutions adopted by overwhelming majority of the international community at the two urgent meetings of the General Assembly and at its emergency special session.

In order to calm the situation and ensure commitment to peace, all of the resolutions adopted at the two urgent meetings and at the emergency special session of the General Assembly should be implemented by Israel, and Israel should implement the accords concluded in the context of the peace process.

My country, Senegal, remains profoundly convinced that the only peace is that based on international legality, on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, on the fundamental principles established by the Madrid, Oslo and Taba agreements which enshrined the exchange of land for peace and the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and to build a State.

The application of this same principle of land for peace could give the bilateral negotiations between Israel and Syria, on the one hand, and Israel and Lebanon, on the other, an acceptable basis as well as more favourable prospects on the road to peace. Senegal therefore calls upon the parties concerned to negotiate confidence-building measures to revive the prospects for peace for the sake of the liberation of the Syrian Golan and the occupied part of Lebanon.

To encourage the advent of a new dawn of peace in the Middle East, my delegation would like, in conclusion, to stress the need for the sponsors of the peace process to commit themselves more to the adoption of confidence-building measures and, above all, the adoption of initiatives to revive the peace process and thus to save peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): It is most regrettable that the situation in the Middle East continues to remain tense and unstable due to the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict. The prolonged cycle of violence and hostilities, as a direct consequence of Israel's continued illegal occupation of Arab territories, has brought tremendous political, economic and social sufferings and hardships to the people of the region, including the loss of human lives. It has kept the region in an economic backwater and deprived its peoples of enjoyment of the full benefits of development.

The signing of the Madrid accord in 1991 raised hopes of a final breakthrough in the Middle East peace process, especially on the Palestinian-Israeli track. The signing of bilateral agreements between the Palestinians and the Israelis led to, most significantly, the transfer of a number of townships in the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority, the latest being Hebron in January 1997. Regrettably, the Israeli Government's unilateral decision early this year to establish a new Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem injected a new and highly contentious element into the precarious peace process. The policy of settlement, along with other patently discriminatory and punitive policies being pursued by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, has led to the virtual derailment of the peace process.

My delegation, along with others, has dealt at length with this issue in this Assembly on previous occasions, including in the debates that have taken place in the last few days. However, it is necessary to reiterate a most important point, which is that permanent peace can only be attained on the basis of negotiations predicated upon mutual confidence and trust, which can only come about if the parties concerned honour the commitments solemnly arrived at.

Even as the international community focuses on efforts to put the Palestinian-Israeli peace process back on track, there is a need to attach similar importance to the other two tracks, namely, the Lebanese-Israeli and Syrian-Israeli tracks, which are integral parts of the overall Middle East peace process.

Clearly, the continued occupation of southern Lebanon by Israel constitutes one of the main stumbling blocks to a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East issue. The continued blatant violation of the sovereignty of an independent Member State of this Organization by Israeli military forces belies Israel's protestations of peaceful intentions towards Lebanon. Israel's repeated assertion and justification of its military presence there are clearly unacceptable and will only ensure continued hostility between Israel and Lebanon rather than improve the prospects for peace. The representative of Israel himself admitted in this Assembly two days ago the political and military costs to Israel of the two mini-wars in which it was involved in Lebanon. Costly as they were to Israel, the results were far more devastating to Lebanon, both in terms of properties damaged and human lives lost.

The series of military attacks carried out by Israel on many towns and villages in Lebanon last year and this year, including the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon refugee camp in Qana, resulted in the deaths of many innocent people, the wounding of hundreds of civilians, the destruction of homes and properties and the displacement of thousands of its inhabitants. The problems of displaced persons, created in the wake of these attacks, has placed an additional burden on the Lebanese Government, even as it grapples with the monumental tasks of national post-war reconstruction, to which the international community should also extend its support. Malaysia reaffirms its strong commitment to and unequivocal support for Lebanon's quest for peace and security, as well as an end to the occupation of part of its sovereign territory by Israel. The Israeli Government ought to have realized by now that its long-term peace and security can best be guaranteed not by maintaining a military garrison on Lebanese soil but by building a cooperative and constructive relationship with its neighbour, based on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The understanding reached between President Al-Assad of Syria and the late Israeli Prime Minister Rabin in June 1995 was a historic and important breakthrough in the peace process between Syria and Israel. Unfortunately, what was seen as a positive and significant development that could possibly lead to the eventual resolution of the question of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights captured by Israel during the 1967 Six Day war turned awry following the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin and the subsequent hard-line approach adopted by the Likud Government, thereby stalemating an otherwise promising prospect for a possible settlement of the Syrian-Israeli conflict.

It is the hope of my delegation that serious contacts between the Syrian and Israeli sides can be resumed at an early date so as to bring about the resumption of a full and constructive dialogue between them. We believe that only through the resumption of such a dialogue between the two sides can there be prospects for a final political settlement of the conflict. Malaysia believes, however, that the only basis for a permanent settlement between Syria and Israel will be the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the occupied Golan Heights and its return to Syria, consistent with the thrust of Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

Malaysia has consistently called for the attainment of comprehensive peace and security in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. This objective can be attained only on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from all of the occupied Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories. We believe that until peace is finally attained, the United Nations, being the universal Organization that is concerned, *inter alia*, with the maintenance of international peace and security, should continue to be seized of the issue.

Mr. Laptsenak (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): Fifty years ago, in resolution 181 (II) the General Assembly decided to partition Palestine and called for the creation of independent Jewish and Arab States. It also called for the establishment of a special international regime for Jerusalem. For many years our Organization, reflecting the will of the international community, has been making active efforts to settle the Middle East conflict, which has prevented the attainment of the age-old aspirations of the peoples of the region to live in peace and prosperity.

In noting the important role played by the United Nations in promoting the peace process in the Middle East, the delegation of Belarus believes in the absolute right of the peoples of the region to peaceful coexistence in an atmosphere of mutual respect and security. Any deviation, albeit insignificant, from the full and timely implementation of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and subsequent implementation agreements can only postpone the attainment of these rights and slow down the peace process.

In this connection, we cannot fail to be seriously concerned at the ongoing deadlock in the Middle East settlement. The signing on 17 January 1997 of the Protocol concerning the redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron, the creation at the beginning of February of this year of eight bilateral Israeli-Palestinian sub-committees to consider outstanding questions during the transitional period and the release of Palestinian women detainees gave us reason to hope for the strengthening of mutual trust between the parties and the creation of favourable conditions for final status talks.

We regret that these hopes have not been realized. The new phase of settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the subsequent resurgence of extremist groups and overall escalation of tension in the region have undermined this positive trend.

Under these extremely difficult circumstances, it is absolutely essential that the parties do everything to refrain from taking unilateral measures that could have a negative impact on the negotiating process. The Palestinians and Israelis should do everything possible to restore mutual trust, revitalize the dialogue for peace and make steady progress throughout the entire transitional period until a permanent settlement is reached.

As was stressed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his report submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/26 on the Middle East:

> "To that end, Israel should refrain from unilateral actions that have the effect of pre-empting the outcome of the talks and the Palestinian Authority should spare no effort in fighting terrorism effectively." [A/52/581, para. 8]

The delegation of Belarus shares that view. It is quite clear that what is on the agenda today is also the immediate resolution of questions that can help restore trust between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel such as the further redeployment of the Israeli troops on the West Bank, the opening of air and sea ports in Gaza, the easing of rules for the transit of Palestinian goods and ensuring safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In particular, we stress the need for active efforts by the parties concerned to combat terrorism effectively in order to develop close and full practical cooperation in the area of security. Terrorism is an extremely serious obstacle to peace in the Middle East. The Republic of Belarus unconditionally condemns terrorism and political extremism in all their manifestations. In our view, the use of such methods cannot promote the attainment of any noble goal whatsoever.

The delegation of Belarus expresses concern at the sharp drop in living standards among Palestinians as a result of the setback in the Middle East peace process. Further worsening of the Palestinians' socioeconomic conditions could lead to an explosive situation that would make peace virtually unattainable. We call upon donor States, the Bretton Woods institutions and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to redouble their efforts to help strengthen the economic structures of the Palestinian territories in order to ease the current situation there as soon as possible.

It is quite clear that genuine peace in the Middle East is impossible without significant progress on the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel tracks. We hope that Israel and Syria will resume dialogue based on the principle of exchanging land for peace, the gradual withdrawal of Israeli troops and the demilitarization of the Syrian Golan.

Positive movement on the Lebanese negotiating track is likewise of great importance for attaining a comprehensive settlement. We hope that in the near future we can look forward to the start of negotiations between the parties which will lead to the complete restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

In conclusion, the delegation of Belarus would like to express its profound commitment to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East on the basis of the formula of land for peace enshrined in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), with full respect for the rights of all States of the region to live in peace within secure, internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The past year has been a difficult one for the peace process in the Middle East. There have been few signs of concrete progress, and today we face a vicious circle of frustration. We must be conscious that the peace process, which began amid so much hope in Madrid in 1991, is now in serious danger.

In this context, Argentina is participating in this debate in order to urge the parties not to abandon the path of negotiation they embarked on together. They must renew their commitment to peace and resume a frank and open dialogue. We believe that this is the only realistic way of resolving the conflict. We encourage the efforts of United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and we trust that her forthcoming meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Paris and with President

Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority in Geneva will give positive impetus to the negotiations.

We are convinced that the principle of land for peace — the essence of the entire negotiating process — establishes reasonable and objective criteria for resolving this long-standing dispute in a just, comprehensive and lasting way. We urge the parties to fulfil in good faith, and on the basis of respect for this principle, the commitments already undertaken in Madrid, Oslo and Washington, with a view to initiating talks on the final status as soon as possible.

Any peace process has as protagonists the parties to the conflict that is to be resolved. The role of protagonist entails certain obligations as well as a firm stand on the importance of not altering the climate of trust that is the prerequisite for progress in any negotiation.

The decision to build new settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, has affected the peace process and prompted the convening of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. That decision is a unilateral act contrary to international law and its basic principle: the prohibition of the acquisition of territory by force. The construction of settlements also pre-empts the outcome of the negotiations that are yet to begin on the final status of the occupied territories. For these reasons, we urge once again that those measures be reconsidered and that their negative effects be taken into account, in the light of the fact that it is in Israel's permanent and fundamental interest to live in peace with its neighbours.

At the same time, Argentina unequivocally condemns all the acts of violence committed on Israeli territory, which have claimed many victims among the civilian population. Under no circumstances does terrorism constitute an effective response. Its use endangers the entire peace process. Argentina therefore wishes to reiterate once again the right of the State of Israel to live within secure, internationally recognized borders, without acts or threats of violence.

It is of fundamental importance to go beyond the present difficult moment and move into a phase that allows for tangible results to be achieved by the parties. We believe that it is essential to re-establish a climate of trust among them. Without trust, no compromise solution, however reasonable and well-balanced, can succeed. Extreme positions must be avoided, for they lead only to isolation and condemnation and prevent Palestinians and Israelis from becoming partners in peace.

The bilateral negotiations were, and we hope will again become, the driving force in the peace process. Nonetheless, they do not preclude the role of the United Nations, which has a special responsibility towards Palestine and a positive part to play in promoting a peaceful solution. Over the past 50 years the contributions made by the United Nations have been undeniable, through peacekeeping operations, programmes of economic, social and humanitarian assistance or the personal commitment of its Secretaries-General to the cause of peace.

Argentina has supported and will continue to support the work of the United Nations by participating, as it has done for many years now, in peacekeeping operations and, more recently, through the "White Helmets" initiative.

It is important that progress be simultaneous on every track of the peace process. Argentina, therefore, considers it essential to resume the peace talks between Syria and Israel that were suspended in February 1996. Nor can we conceal our grave concern at the situation in southern Lebanon. Argentina reaffirms its commitment to the territorial integrity, political independence and full sovereignty of Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

The Madrid accords of 1991 were a historic step, producing as they did a profound change in expectations. For the first time in many years, the men and women of the Middle East felt the hope of a shared future of peace, stability and progress. We appeal to the parties not to betray those expectations and to embark once again on the path of negotiation, dialogue, tolerance and law.

Mr. Wilmot (Ghana): During the Assembly's review of the situation in the Middle East last year, my delegation expressed its gratification at the positive developments which had culminated in the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Accord on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on 28 September 1995, followed by the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, the initiation of the Palestinian Authority in those areas and the redeployment of the Israeli army from six cities in the West Bank. These developments had generated great expectations and hope among the population of the occupied territories in particular, and the international community in general, that a lasting peace would at last be established in the region. These expectations were further enhanced by the signing on 15 January 1997 of the Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron.

It is against this background that my delegation expresses its grave concern at the virtual cessation of further implementation of the interim self-government arrangements freely entered into by the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. We are particularly concerned about the settlement policy of the present Israeli Government. As is well known, on 2 August 1996 the Israeli Cabinet decided to cancel the previous Government's restrictions placed on the development of settlements since 1992. Since then, the Israeli Government has embarked on a systematic confiscation of Arab-owned land, the expansion of settlements and the construction of bypass roads and quarries. New settlements have been built, and we learn that their total number in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is around 194. We further learn that settlement expansion in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan is also envisaged.

The most serious development in this regard is the decision taken in February this year to build 6,500 Jewish housing units in Jebel Abu Ghneim. This project, which is intended to complete the chain of Israeli settlements encircling Arab-populated East Jerusalem, has brought the peace process to a halt. We are deeply concerned about this development.

The frustration caused by the construction of settlements has been further aggravated by the implementation of other measures by the Israeli Government, including the revocation of the residency rights of the Palestinian Jerusalemites. We learn in this connection that some 60,000 to 80,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites stand in danger of losing their residency rights. The Israeli policy in this regard is obviously calculated to reduce the Arab population of Jerusalem and thereby change the demographic situation on the ground.

We wish the General Assembly to reaffirm the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force under international law and the Charter of the United Nations and to reiterate that all illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, especially settlement activities, cannot be recognized, irrespective of the passage of time.

Indeed, any attempt to alter the demographic and legal status of Jerusalem ahead of the final status negotiations is at variance with the letter and spirit of both the Madrid and the Oslo accords. The forcible seizure of lands, the evacuation of Palestinians from the Arab lands in East Jerusalem and the indiscriminate arrest and imprisonment of Palestinians only serve to undermine the basic premise of the peace process, which is the principle of land for peace. We therefore call on Israel to heed international public opinion and put an end to all its illegal activities in the occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem.

We also call on Israel to accept the *de jure* applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to all the territories occupied since 1967.

My delegation commends the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories for its detailed and impartial report in document A/52/131/Add.2.

The report makes depressing reading about human rights violations, including collective punishment through closure of the occupied territories; vandalization of Palestinian property by Israeli settlers; discriminatory administrative measures against Arab inhabitants in East Jerusalem in respect of building permits; intensified application of the Israeli policy regarding residency rights of Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem; increased restrictions on freedom of movement, with serious effects on education; administrative detention of children in contravention of article 37 (b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the continued subjection of Palestinian prisoners to interrogation methods that "amount to torture", to quote the words of the report; and continued manifestation of imbalance in the administration of justice between the sentences handed down to Palestinians as compared with those meted out to Israelis.

These findings must be addressed when concrete measures are drawn up for the revival of the peace process in the region. In the meantime, we call on Israel to implement measures that should safeguard the basic human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories, including in particular the full application of the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We encourage the Special Committee to continue to investigate and report Israeli policies and practices in the occupied territories, and to this end, we request the

Secretary-General to continue to provide all necessary facilities and assistance to the Committee for the discharge of its mandate.

In the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signed in Washington, D.C., on 13 September 1993 by the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, a mechanism was agreed upon by the parties for the return of persons displaced in 1967 and during subsequent hostilities in the Middle East. We are concerned that the process agreed upon has not yet been effected, thus complicating the peace process.

We reaffirm the right of all displaced persons to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel. We consequently call for an accelerated implementation of the agreed mechanism in accordance with article XII of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. In the meantime, we request the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the displaced persons, and we also appeal to all Member States, organizations and individuals to contribute generously to the Agency and other organizations providing assistance to the displaced persons.

Ghana deplores all acts of terrorism and is relieved at the renewal of security contacts between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government in their joint efforts to fight terrorism. However, we pause to caution that actions that frustrate an already depressed and deprived people are likely to provoke unnecessary tensions and instigate violence by extremists, as recent events testify.

The Palestinian issue is the core of the Middle East conflict and provides the barometer for measuring progress or otherwise in the situation in the whole region. We are thus gratified that, despite the numerous setbacks, both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, under the auspices of the United States, are making determined efforts to resume the negotiations. We encourage them, and emphasize the need for both parties to adhere to the provisions of the agreements already concluded and to take measures to implement them in good faith, without delay and within the time- frame stipulated in the Declaration of Principles, until a permanent settlement is achieved on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other United Nations resolutions, including those adopted at the tenth emergency special session of this Assembly.

We reiterate our conviction that for a just and comprehensive peace to be achieved in the region, progress must be made on all tracks of the negotiations. In this regard, we call on Israel and Syria to resume talks on the basis of the principle of land for peace. Likewise, we call for renewed efforts to reach a common basis for negotiations on the Israeli-Lebanese track, based on Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Towards this end, and as a confidence-building measure, cross-border attacks must cease.

The dividend that could accrue to the countries of the Middle East region from peace has been the subject of much comment. We welcomed the series of Middle East/North African economic summits that were held annually for the past three years. We regret that due to the deterioration of the situation in the region, most Arab countries boycotted the recent conference in Doha, Qatar. We hope that all concerned will learn a lesson from this and use their best endeavours to create an environment that will be conducive to a resumption of expanded participation in future conferences for the mutual benefit of all the countries of the region, including Palestine.

In this connection we call for the expansion of and increased support for the role of the United Nations in the socio-economic development of the Palestinians. We hope that with the appointment of Chinmaya Gharekhan as Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories the United Nations role in the economic and social fields will be so strengthened as to enable the Organization to contribute meaningfully to the alleviation of the suffering of the Palestinians and their over-dependence on the Israeli economy.

To conclude, permit me to quote the following passage from the letter of the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva, transmitting the report of the Committee to the Secretary-General:

> "The Special Committee believes that the peace process has reached a decisive stage and that if negotiations are not resumed and the agreements that have already been reached are not fully implemented, the cycle of violence and conflict will continue, thus threatening the peace and stability of

the region. The momentum of the peace negotiations has to be maintained and the Oslo Accords should be implemented in full by both sides and the principle of land for peace underlying the peace agreements should be complied with. The repeated delays in the implementation of the Accords can only endanger the peace process further and could lead to its complete breakdown, which would be dangerous for the whole region.

"It is vital that a dialogue between the parties be maintained and that the peace process continue. All parties concerned should respect the spirit and letter of the Oslo Accords and show renewed commitment to the peace process by an immediate resumption of the peace talks. The frustration and despair of Palestinians have almost completely eroded their trust in the peace process, which is now at a standstill. The peace talks between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel have also come to a halt. Only tangible progress in peace talks with consequent changes on the ground can bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace to the Middle East. All parties concerned must work together to safeguard the peace effort." [A/52/131/Add.2, p. 8]

My delegation fully endorses these sentiments.

Mr. Nuñez-Mosquera (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The item on the situation in the Middle East has been on the General Assembly's agenda for years. Many resolutions have been adopted by this organ at its regular and its special sessions. The consideration of the item is of singular importance and significance this year because of the current situation in the peace process, which is struggling with contradictions and setbacks.

The Palestinian people and the peoples of all the occupied Arab territories find themselves today more than ever before at a crucial moment in their history. The genuine efforts being made to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region continue to meet with serious and hostile incidents provoked by the occupying Power, which persists in its policy of aggression and threat against the entire course of the peace process in the region.

No one is unaware of the fact that this situation is facilitated by the support which the United States gives to Israel on all fronts, in particular in the Security Council, where it does not conceal its determination to veto any resolution containing firm denunciations of the conduct of its strategically in the Middle East.

That support must cease. It is also necessary to express a clear determination to put an end to the occupation of all the Arab and Palestinian territories and to ensure that the letter and spirit of the provisions of the Declaration of Principles, the Cairo Agreement, the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip and all subsequent agreements are respected. It is extremely important, moreover, to see to it that the terms and phases of the peace process endorsed in these international agreements are met.

We must promote the greatest political, legal and moral support of the United Nations for the cause of the Palestinian people and of all the peoples of the occupied Arab territories, and for the peace process in the Middle East.

The General Assembly must ensure greater recognition of the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations for purposes of procedure and his ability to participate in debates. Cuba supports the position of the Arab States Members of this Organization and of the Observer Mission of Palestine that the credentials of Israel not be considered applicable to the occupied Arab territories.

The question of Palestine is at the heart of the conflict in the Middle East and there must be a real will to negotiate to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict as a whole. Cuba reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital, and rejects measures aimed at changing the legal status and demographic composition of that city. We call for the return of all the occupied Arab territories.

Cuba advocates respect for and the application of the principles and norms of international humanitarian law to the people of Palestine and the peoples of all the occupied Arab territories. In particular, we support the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to Israeli acts in the territory of Palestine and all the occupied Arab territories.

The Palestinian people and the peoples of all the occupied Arab territories need the General Assembly and the United Nations to play an effective and truly committed role in the peace process in the Middle East. Cuba will contribute fully to that objective.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian

People is celebrated on 29 November. On that date in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which changed the face of history in the Middle East. The resolution partitioned Palestine into two States: one Jewish, the other a State for the Arabs of Palestine, Christian and Muslim alike. It also established an independent legal regime, a *corpus separatum*, for the city of Jerusalem.

The history of the region was changed by that resolution. On the basis of its provisions, the Jewish National Council declared on 14 May 1948 the establishment of the State of Israel. The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel invoked the partition resolution. It stated that Israel would be established

> "on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly".

In accordance with that resolution, the General Assembly established, alongside the Jewish State, an Arab State in the territory of Palestine. For many reasons and circumstances that cannot be dwelt upon in detail here, that State has never seen the light of day. It might be said, however, that the partition resolution is the birth certificate of two States, not just one. Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi explained that point eloquently and with great logic two days ago.

On another level, the League of Arab States adopted a resolution concerning Palestine in 1948, in which it reaffirmed the independence of Palestine. The General Assembly took the date of 29 November, 1947, into account when it decided in 1997 to establish it as the Day that crystallizes the international community's solidarity with the Palestinian people in its struggle. Moreover, and coincidentally, 22 November 1997 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of its famous resolution 242 (1967), which lays the foundation on which peace in the Middle East should be established: the reaffirmation of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

This is the principle from which flows another extremely important principle, trading land for peace, which has been accepted as the basis of the peace process and its first frame of reference by all the parties to that process, including Israel, since the beginning of the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations in 1977 — twenty years ago — and up until the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the subsequent negotiations and agreements between the Arab parties and Israel.

This recollection of the historical background of an aspect of dealing with the question of Palestine in the United Nations is aimed at highlighting and emphasizing the genuine role of the United Nations in dealing with this question and its historic responsibility for it until a just, lasting and comprehensive peace is achieved.

The delegation of Egypt most regrettably notes that 1997 has not witnessed any real progress on any of the bilateral negotiating tracks between Israel and the Arab parties concerned — namely, the Palestinian Authority, Syria and Lebanon. With regard to the Palestinian track, with the exception of the limited progress achieved by the signing of the Protocol Concerning the Israeli Redeployment in Hebron/Al-Khalil — which the Government of Israel is constantly using as proof of its peaceful orientation despite the fact that it was signed by the previous Israeli Government and then reopened to negotiation under various pressures — the current year has seen many setbacks which have taken the region back to the pre-peace-process atmosphere and to the spirit which prevailed in the region before the Madrid Conference.

We should recall here that these setbacks began with the decision of the current Israeli Government to construct a settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, south of East Jerusalem. The necessity of condemning that decision was supported by 14 members of the Security Council. But, regrettably, that condemnation was not forthcoming for reasons which are well known to all here. The General Assembly dealt with this subject during its fifty-first session and in an emergency special session — which was resumed twice — during which it decided last month to initiate preparations for convening a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to consider measures which would ensure Israel's respect for its responsibilities under that Convention, which is *de jure* applicable to the occupied Arab territories.

The delegation of Egypt would like to reaffirm an important fact which must not be forgotten by the current Israeli Government: it is impossible for peace to be established in the region with the continued Israeli settlement policy. The position of Egypt in this regard is clear and could be summed up as follows: Egypt restored through negotiations, 20 years ago, all of its territories without any settlements despite the fact that some settlements had been constructed in Sinai when those negotiations took place. This constitutes a basic precedent in the establishment of peace between Israel and the Arab

States. It also places great responsibility on Egypt to reject the attempts and efforts of the Government of Israel to impose settlements on the Arab parties as a *fait accompli* that the Arabs must accept.

Israel is also systematically and intensively endeavouring to alter the geographic and demographic character of the City of Jerusalem. Israel tries by all ways and means to empty it of its Palestinian inhabitants. In this respect, Israel even went to the extent of claiming that they are foreigners living in Jerusalem, in order to bolster the claim that a unified Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the State of Israel. Thus Israel is totally flouting an established reality of international relations, holding on to a claim that only it believes, perhaps because of the frequency with which it repeats that claim.

In this connection, I would also like to refer to the fact that these measures constitute a flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), in addition to violating the Oslo agreement, in which Israel freely accepted that the future of the City of Jerusalem would be one of the subjects of the final status negotiations. I would also like, in this respect, to reaffirm that Israel, as the occupying Power, is obliged under the Fourth Geneva Convention not to alter the demographic composition or the geographic character of the city and the other occupied territories as long as their final status has not been determined through negotiations.

Moving from the Palestinian track to the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, we would regrettably find that the modest steps taken since the beginning of the peace process in 1991 towards bridging the wide confidence gap between the two Arab States on the one hand, and Israel on the other, have come to a halt since May 1996. Indeed, confidence has receded to the level which prevailed in the previous decade. The current Israeli Government alone is responsible for this situation because of its intransigent refusal to recognize the progress which had been achieved in the negotiations between Syria and the previous Israeli Government, as well its refusal to withdraw unconditionally from southern Lebanon, as it is obliged to do under the provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

Egypt links the progress made on the bilateral negotiating tracks on the one hand, and the acceleration of economic cooperation in its various forms and fields on the other. The drive towards peace in the Middle East is an indivisible whole. Normal relations in economic cooperation between the Arab States and Israel cannot come into being, develop or flourish with the deadlock in the peace process, the continued Israeli intransigence through its continued refusal to withdraw from the Arab territories it has occupied since 30 years ago.

For this reason, and in view of the regrettable regression of the peace process in the Middle East which I have just described, Egypt decided not to participate in the regional economic conference held last month. Without question, Egypt hopes that the peace process would witness positive developments which could revive regional cooperation, but on sound bases, and on the basis that Israel would realize that it cannot reap the harvest of benefits of economic cooperation with the States of the region if it continues to deal with its neighbours on the basis of concepts of occupation, condescension, hegemony, disregard for rights or not fulfilling international obligations.

The Permanent Representative of Israel today said that economic cooperation is not a prize which could be given to Israel or withheld from it. We agree with him. It must be very clear that there is an organic and indivisible link between the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace on the one hand, and the promotion of the equal economic cooperation which is of benefit to all without distinction on the other. Using the same logic, we say that the restoration of the occupied territories to their legitimate owners is not a prize to be given to or withheld from the Arabs by Israel according to its whims. The establishment of a comprehensive just and lasting peace is the great prize for which all must strive, because it is the only way to achieve security and prosperity for the peoples of the region.

As I have just said, a just and comprehensive peace is the basis for achieving security. Egypt therefore continues to call for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. This concept is supported by consensus in the General Assembly every year. Egypt has also been calling for the establishment of a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East since the initiative of President Mubarak on 18 April 1990. The Security Council adopted this call in resolution 687 (1991). I should like in this regard to refer to Israel's continued and reiterated refusal to take any confidence-building measures concerning the inspection of its nuclear facilities, which adds to the factors of political tension in the region.

Finally, the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East requires a different outlook in Israel, an outlook that focuses on clarifying the facts and highlighting the benefits that could be derived from the establishment of peace. But there should be a leadership which truly believes in the achievement of peace. If such leadership does not believe in the feasibility of a just and comprehensive peace and constantly attempts to strip it of all genuine content, failing to comprehend the necessity of reaching a solution in order to construct the peace edifice, then the current peace process, which is now reeling, will collapse, and the Middle East will return to the era of confrontation and tension that prevailed before 1991. We must all act in concert to prevent such an occurrence.

Mr. Park (Republic of Korea): In the view of my delegation, the year 1997 will most likely be recorded as one of the years that saw the least progress in the Middle East peace process since its inception in 1991 on the basis of the "land-for-peace" principle at the Madrid Peace Conference.

Although the international community rejoiced over the momentous agreement to redeploy Israeli forces from Hebron at the beginning of this year, that optimism was, unfortunately, short-lived. As we all know, the mistrust between the Israelis and the Palestinians has intensified in the wake of the Israeli settlement activities, especially in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of East Jerusalem.

At the Security Council meetings held in March to deal with this issue, many delegations, including my own, made it clear that these Israeli measures, which contravene relevant international conventions and Council resolutions, could have serious repercussions on the entire peace process, especially in light of the well-known political sensitivities associated with Jerusalem. At that time, we also emphasized the importance of the adoption by both sides of a prudent and level-headed approach, and we stressed that violence should not be a tool for solving problems.

However, to the dismay of all those who held out strong hope for meaningful progress in the Middle East peace process, the developments following the Israeli construction of housing units in Jebel Abu Ghneim became a source of grave concern. In particular, a series of terrorist bombing attacks, which occurred in Israel in March, July and September, dealt another blow to the peace process while claiming many innocent lives.

Under these circumstances, the United Nations membership even found itself having to convene an emergency special session of the General Assembly — an institutional mechanism never employed in the post-cold-war era — on a problem whose cause seemed so obvious and whose solution so clear-cut.

At this juncture, and in this forum, my delegation has no intention whatsoever of engaging in time-consuming polemics about which side is more to blame for the current impasse in the peace process. We would rather take this opportunity to urge both the Israelis and the Palestinians to reflect on whether the present situation is what they really want, and, if not, to undertake immediately discussions on all remaining questions, including further Israeli redeployment, a Palestinian airport in Gaza and a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the settlement issue, in a candid and open-minded manner.

It should be noted in this regard that through a chain of extreme actions and reactions during the year, the basis of trust laid by Israelis and Palestinians thus far has been eroded to a considerable extent. My delegation is particularly concerned that momentum for the peace process may be irrevocably lost if prudent and courageous steps are not taken in the near future jointly by Israel and Palestine. Indeed, time may not necessarily be on their side.

Having said that, my delegation wishes to emphasize that the Arab-Israeli relationship as a whole should be both perceived and handled as a typical non-zero-sum game. In other words, what one side gains in the bilateral relationship can help the other side achieve its goal, thereby making it possible for both sides to have a win-win situation. We believe that this notion of a non-zero-sum game should underpin not only the relationship between Israel and Palestine but also the Israel-Lebanon and the Israel-Syria tracks, neither of which has made much headway over the past year. The lack of progress in these two areas concerns us, since the Middle East peace process can be complete only when all the components of the Arab-Israeli relationship move forward in accordance with the approach envisioned at the Madrid Peace Conference.

While full recognition of the non-zero-sum nature of the Arab-Israeli relationship is one of the immediate requirements to overcome the deadlock in the Middle East peace process, we believe that increased trade and investment can contribute to creating an environment conducive to regional peace and security. Indeed, based on the belief that peace and development are two sides of the same coin, my Government has earmarked $15 million for the period 1994-1998 with the aim of assisting rehabilitation projects undertaken by the Palestinian people. It was also in this spirit that my Government participated in the fourth Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference held in Doha last month, which discussed various ways for "Creating a new private/public partnership for trade and economic growth beyond the year 2000".

Clearly recognizing the far-reaching implications that the Middle East carries for world peace and prosperity, the Republic of Korea has consistently supported the peace process in the region and closely followed its implementation. As my delegation emphasized at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly during its debate on the situation in the Middle East, exactly one year ago, we believe that tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship have often stemmed from the impact of domestic politics on international relations. Solutions to these problems, therefore, can also be found in the domestic dimension. While a number of commendable initiatives undertaken by the international community can help to advance the peace process, it goes without saying that the most critical element is for the parties directly concerned to bridge the existing political chasm.

In this vein, we firmly believe that, despite certain setbacks, the truly remarkable progress made since the inception of the peace process proves that both Israelis and Palestinians are capable of mustering the courage, wisdom and patience necessary to overcome the current difficulties.

In closing, my delegation wishes once again to urge both sides to reinject momentum into the stalled peace process and to implement all the agreements within the framework of the Oslo accords so that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace can be established in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Mr. Al-Adofi (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Republic of Yemen takes a positive position of support for the Middle East peace process begun at the Madrid conference in October 1991, which called for the attainment of a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of respect for and implementation of binding international resolutions, including Security Council resolutions Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), of successive agreements and the relevant protocols, of the principle of land for peace, and of Israel's complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories. In that light, my country reaffirms that only a comprehensive, just and lasting peace can be the basis for security, stability and prosperity in the region and a guarantee that violence and the causes of extremism will be eliminated and tolerance, peaceful coexistence and cultural cooperation among peoples will be promoted.

On the basis of that position, we state our concern at Israel's return to the policy and practice of establishing settlements in Palestinian territories, in particular around the Holy City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, of building other settlements and destroying Palestinian homes, of constructing bypass roads for Israeli settlers, and of maintaining the blockade of the Palestinian territories. Those Israeli actions are flagrant violations of the agreements Israel has concluded with the Palestinian Authority and will inevitably lead to increased tension and return the Middle East peace process to its starting point or even totally cripple it.

That is why we stress the need for speedy progress towards a final settlement granting the Palestinian people its legitimate rights, particularly its right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State with its capital at Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in accordance with internationally binding resolutions and with the fundamental principles of the Madrid conference. Negotiations must resume, addressing all aspects on an equal footing and on the basis of the principle of respect by all parties for their commitments.

The Republic of Yemen welcomed the Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, the Declaration of Principles and related agreements, and all the initiatives, agreements and protocols aimed at a just and comprehensive peace. My country also welcomed the agreement between Jordan and Israel and hopes that this will constitute a step forward towards a just, comprehensive and lasting peace and a prelude to an Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and from southern Lebanon. We call upon the United States, a sponsor of the peace process, to exert pressure on the Israeli Government to resume the peace process, which had made notable progress following the Madrid conference and the adoption of the Declaration of Principles. Israel must dispel the despair felt by peoples of the region at the end of the positive period that preceded the coming to power of the present Israeli Government.

There are many initiatives that the international community could call for to promote the Middle East peace process. Here I would mention the final communiqué of the summit of the Group of Seven plus the Russian Federation, as well as the declarations issued by the Arab Summit held at Cairo, by the summit of the European Union, and by the summit of African Heads of State or Government. Such declarations and communiqués are of great importance because they were issued at summits held after the Middle East peace process had already deteriorated because of the Israeli Government's policy of delaying the resumption of negotiations, failing to live up to agreements, continuing the construction of settlements, persisting in Judaizing Palestinian lands and continuing its blockade of the Palestinian National Authority.

We call upon Israel to comply with the basic tenets of the peace process, in particular the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the principle of land for peace. We urgently appeal to Israel to implement the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians entered into in the framework of the peace process. Israel must understand that it cannot undermine the foundations of the peace process or the need to resume that process. The stakes for all countries are too high to be violated by policies running counter to principles of international law: the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and the principle of land for peace.

In this context, my country welcomes the declarations of international summits calling upon all the parties concerned to honour their commitments immediately. This is a source of comfort and encouragement with regard to the peace process in the Middle East.

The attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East should go hand in hand with ensuring security and stability through equal commitments by all the States of the region to make that region free from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. It should also go hand in hand with Israel's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the opening of its nuclear facilities to International Atomic Energy Agency inspection as a step towards creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone and freeing the region of the dangers posed by all weapons of mass destruction. This is because the security of States may be guaranteed through a peaceful settlement respecting the rights of all concerned and the interests of all negotiating parties. Negotiations should be based on agreement in all areas — economic, social, cultural and scientific.

The peace process now confronts dangers and risks that hinder the attainment of its objectives. Israeli policy seeks to defer and delay the resumption of negotiations with the Syrian Arab Republic, negotiations which should be based on agreements reached with the previous Israeli Government, in particular the commitment to total withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and occupied southern Lebanon, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the principle of "land for peace".

We equally underscore the need for Israel to commit itself to respect the sovereignty and independence of fraternal Lebanon, release Lebanese prisoners and detainees from Israeli camps and compensate Lebanon for all the damage caused by continuous Israeli aggression against its territory and people.

Finally, I wish to express the hope that the international community will come together in solidarity to encourage a resumption of the Middle East peace process so as to bring about stability in that region and hence international peace and security.

Mr. Owada (Japan): Japan is deeply concerned about the present situation in the Middle East, where virtually no progress has been made towards peace this year. The urgent need for all the parties directly concerned to make their best efforts to set the peace process back on track cannot be over-emphasized at this juncture.

Japan wishes to make one more urgent appeal to all the leaders involved in this regard. Indeed, it is in recognition of the critical importance of the success of this peace process to achieve durable peace in the Middle East that Japan has been actively participating in the peace process by engaging in intensified dialogue with the parties directly concerned, by sending its own contingents to a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the region, and by offering its active contribution to the multilateral talks on the Middle East launched in Madrid in 1991.

It is extremely regrettable that, despite all the efforts by Japan, the United States, the European Union and other interested countries, as well as those made by the United Nations, we have been witnessing a serious reversal in the process, due mainly, in Japan's view, to the hardening of positions in more recent months on the part of the parties concerned. In this dire situation, there is all the more reason to stress that it is the parties directly concerned that should make the greatest efforts, since it is they who will most directly enjoy the fruits of peace.

In January of this year we had reason to be hopeful that progress could be made on the Palestinian track, when, following a period of difficult negotiations, Israel withdrew its troops from Hebron. But subsequently the parties reverted to a vicious cycle, when the start of construction of Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem triggered a new situation, in which radical Palestinian groups launched terrorist attacks and Israel responded with a series of unilateral steps, including the closure of the West Bank.

While the talks between the Palestinian Authority and Israel were partially resumed in October, thanks to the efforts made by the United States and other interested countries, the positions of the two parties remain deeply divided, and no significant progress in their talks is as yet discernible. In short, the year that began with some renewed hope is ending in profound disappointment.

We in the international community learned of the recent decision of the Israeli Government to withdraw more of its troops from the West Bank, on certain conditions, only to be followed by the Palestinian rejection of that decision on account of the new conditions attached to it by Israel. My delegation feels bound to point out that Israel is required to abide by its solemn obligation under the Oslo accord and the Hebron agreement on the withdrawal of its troops. The decision for redeployment, which in itself may constitute progress on the Palestinian track, has been marred by its vagueness, with regard to the extent of the withdrawal and the specific time-frame, and by the new conditions it imposes, making this decision more contentious. Japan believes that the decision by Israel to withdraw its troops must contain the necessary specifics if it is meant to be genuinely meaningful.

At the same time, my Government continues to emphasize its fundamental opposition to all forms of terrorism, and particularly in this situation, where terrorist acts could threaten the peace negotiations.

My delegation is firmly convinced that it is crucial for the Palestinians and the Israelis to re-establish the relationship of mutual confidence by implementing in good faith the agreements to which they have already committed themselves.

Turning our attention to the Syrian track, we note that here, too, the talks have been at an impasse since February of this year. Japan calls upon both parties to strive to reconcile the differences in their positions and restart the talks as soon as possible.

Nor is progress observable on the Lebanon track. It is most unfortunate that the parties are not engaged in substantive negotiations. Instead, continued hostilities in southern Lebanon are taking a tragic toll in human life, not only among the military, but also among the civilian population. I wish strongly to urge the parties to adhere strictly to the ceasefire they agreed on in April of last year.

Looking at these worrying developments, Japan is profoundly disturbed by the serious setback with which the Madrid process, launched in 1991 amid the hope of the international community, and with its blessing, is being threatened. The danger will be real if the present precarious situation surrounding the Palestinian track is not adequately addressed. The impasse in the peace process, not only on the Palestinian track but on all the tracks, could reduce to naught the precious mutual trust that has been built by the assiduous efforts of the parties involved over the years. It is crucial at this juncture that each of the parties make maximum efforts and strive in good faith to honour its commitments so as to restore the relationship of mutual trust which is so essential to the achievement of lasting peace.

Japan will maintain its commitment to participate actively in the international efforts in support of the Middle East peace process. Japan will make use of every opportunity available to assist the parties directly concerned through strengthening its dialogue with them, and its persuasion, and through offering cooperation for improving the environment to expedite the direct negotiations between the parties.

Japan has been pursuing this approach, particularly with regard to the Palestinian track. It has taken every opportunity to call upon the Israeli Government not to take unilateral actions, such as constructing illegal settlements in the West Bank, that can jeopardize the atmosphere of mutual trust, so essential to progress in the peace process. Thus, the Government of Japan, at its highest level, has brought this issue directly to the attention of the Israeli leadership on a number of occasions, including the official visit of Foreign Minister Levy to Japan in February and the visit of Prime Minister Netanyahu to Japan in August, as well as the visit of the special envoy of the Government of Japan to Israel, where he raised the settlement and other issues directly with Prime Minister Netanyahu. Japan has also taken every opportunity to appeal to Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian leadership to make every effort to suppress any act of terrorism, and to cooperate with Israel in the maintenance of law and order.

We in Japan believe that economic hardships inflicted upon the Palestinians through such unilateral measures as closure and the freezing of remittances by Israel tend to create a hotbed of violence and terrorist acts in the area. The commitment of Japan to promoting the peace process should be clear from its active participation in providing economic assistance to the Palestinians who are suffering severe economic hardship. In an effort to help stabilize the Palestinian community, Japan recently decided to extend a new aid package of $23.6 million, of which approximately $12.6 million will be allocated to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and $11 million to the United Nations Development Programme — Japan Fund for Palestinian Development. With this new package, Japan's assistance to Palestinians over the years amounts to more than $310 million. Although Japan attaches importance to easing the economic hardships of the Palestinian people, there is a limit to what it can do alone. Its own resources, as well as those of other donor countries, are limited. From this viewpoint, the stalemate in the multilateral talks, talks which could contribute to the enhancement of the welfare of the people, along with the stalemate in each of the tracks, is most regrettable. Japan, as the country chairing of one of the working groups, will continue to work for the promotion of the practical measures under discussion in the multilateral talks.

The contribution by Japan to the peacekeeping missions in the region should also be understood in the same context. Since February of last year Japan has been participating in the United Nations peacekeeping operation deployed in the Golan Heights under the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). Also, in January 1996, the Government of Japan sent to the region a 77-member team, headed by Mr. Obuchi, the present Foreign Minister of Japan, to monitor the Palestinian elections.

The United Nations has been closely linked with the long history of establishing peace in the Middle East, especially through the decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, including Security Council resolution 242 (1967). In this sense, the General Assembly and the Security Council have been playing an important role in the effort of the United Nations for peace in the Middle East. However, it should be emphasized once again, by way of a conclusion to my intervention, that the most important and crucial factor for achieving a durable peace is that the parties engage in peace talks in all seriousness and in good faith on the basis of complete mutual trust. It is only on that premise that the international community can make its share of contributions to the peace process, through monitoring the direction in which the peace talks are proceeding, and through creating a favourable environment for sustaining the efforts of the parties directly involved. In the name of the Government of Japan, I wish to pledge that Japan is ready to cooperate with all the parties involved in moving in that direction.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.